

THE VIEW FROM THE DITCH
BAR NONE & NONE BARRED IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

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The Demonstration Project is an experiment in an alternative to traditional interfaith dialogue, in which the main activity is listening to religious leaders or talking about religion in small groups. First Community is a primarily white, upper middle class congregation whose members have little personal experience with Muslim people. For this reason, their knowledge about Muslims is limited to what they see and read in the media, where the picture of a violent extremist is the predominant image of followers of Islam. The project tested a light hearted, low stakes team building activity to allow Muslims and Christians to work collaboratively and get to know each other as people, before they entered into dialogue about their faith traditions. Using qualitative research, the project demonstrated that one-to-one contact in a fun environment is an effective opening to deeper dialogue. When people from First Community Church were able to “rub elbows” with their Muslim neighbors, they come to understand that they share common values and a common faith in God.

The dissertation includes a review of social identity theory, a sampling of Muslim-Christian partnerships in the midwestern United States, an examination of the Common Word initiative, and an exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan as it can be applied to multifaith engagement.

Dedicated to:

My grandmother Isabel, for the gift of faith and the habit of scholarship;
My son William, for joyful presence and support;
My brother Spencer, for understanding about moving the needle;
My parents, Annette and Chad, for teaching me how to work hard and love life;
And the people of First Community Church.
It is a privilege and joy to be your pastor.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING 1

CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGE 7

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTION: LOVE THE NEIGHBOR 16

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTION: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY 41

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH QUESTION: CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM PARTNERSHIPS 53

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT AND EVALUATION 63

CHAPTER 7

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES 89

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS 98

APPENDICES

Appendix A

PROJECT PROPOSAL 103

Appendix B

NEWSLETTER COLUMNS 145

Appendix C

SERMONS 154

Appendix D

ISLAM 101 RESPONSES.....	164
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Appendix E

TOOLS FOR BRIDGE BUILDING ACTIVITY	173
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BIBLIOGRAPHY	178
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

At the turn of the twentieth century, the neighborhood around First Community Church (FCC) became the first independent suburb of Columbus, Ohio. It was located in the area known as Marble Cliff, where the trolley line from downtown ended. When residents got tired of taking the trolley to the “big steeple churches” in the city center, they began planning for a new neighborhood congregation. Those planning sessions were held in the study of Dr. Washington Gladden, pastor of First Congregational Church downtown and Gladden was instrumental in hiring the congregation’s first minister. To this day the spirit of Washington Gladden and the Social Gospel movement are embedded in the ministries of FCC.

During those founding days, local residents longed for a church that served the entire community and that could be free of denominational divisions. After a vote by the neighborhood, FCC was incorporated as Grandview Heights Congregational Church in 1910.¹ Nine years later, FCC opted to become a community church that was not affiliated with any denomination and the church became a leader in the community church movement of the early twentieth century. FCC’s senior minister, Roy Burkhardt, was the

¹ Jackie Cherry, *Reflections on Our Heritage: A History of First Community Church*, (Columbus: Self-published, 2009), 128.

first president of the National Council of Community Churches.² There were limitations to being a community church: FCC could not participate in the National Council of Churches; the church was dependent on seminaries run by denominations for the training of clergy; and ministers, whose credentials were maintained by denominations, had to hold membership in another church while serving FCC. In a statement to the congregation in 1959, the senior minister, Otis Maxfield, urged church members to agree to affiliate: “Churches that stand alone are ‘orphan’ churches and not part of the organized church. We can point the way [for other community churches] by which these orphan churches can grow into a kind of relatedness that will give more point and meaning to their existence and ours.”³

Beginning in 1959, FCC was affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The church has a self-identity first articulated in 1924 as “the church of the infinite quest.” FCC focuses on the innovative and challenging, valuing personal transformation through spiritual growth. In the FCC vision statement, the congregation is described as:

A diverse community of individuals, each actively seeking to make Christ’s example of God’s love for every person real in our world through service, study, worship and giving;
Celebrating life in groupings of families and individuals
Risking with innovation while honoring tradition
Encouraging search and empowering belief
Standing with those who suffer
Loving unconditionally

² Ibid., 135.

³ Ibid., 137-138.

FCC is a progressive, open and affirming community of 6,500 members (5,000 adults and 1,500 youth) in worship, fellowship and mission at three locations: the South Campus in Grandview Heights, the North Campus in the Hilliard/Dublin area, and Camp Akita, a children's camp and adult retreat center in the Hocking Hills. Sunday worship attendance averages 900 over four services. It is a well-educated congregation; the majority of adult church members have a college degree and about a third have advanced degrees. While FCC is a large, program-rich institution, there is a commitment to maintaining a pastoral church. A deliberate and intentional focus on pastoral care means members' needs for comfort and ministerial presence are met during times of struggle and celebration.

FCC is a theologically diverse faith community. From former Mennonites to Catholics to Unitarians, a large percentage of the congregation arrived from other traditions; the clergy staff represents a variety of denominational backgrounds as well. The church takes pride in the "Spiritual Searcher" program that has hosted leading theologians such as Huston Smith, William Sloane Coffin, John Dominic Crossan, Amy-Jill Levine, Marcus Borg, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner and James Finley.

FCC has always been a leading voice in progressive theology as well as open and inclusive ministry. Early evidence of this openness appeared in 1938 with the Bar None dances for young people in the church gym. The motto was "Bar None—no bar and none barred." In the 1930s the ethnic friction in the neighborhood occurred between Anglo Protestants and Italian Catholics, but at FCC everyone was welcome to play basketball in the gym and to attend the Bar None dances. The legacy continued through the civil rights

movement up to the mid 1990s when the Governing Board of the church voted to conduct same-sex commitment ceremonies.

While the congregation is diverse in sexual orientation, it lacks ethnic, racial and economic diversity. First Community Church is a predominantly white, upper middle class congregation that mirrors the neighborhoods it serves. FCC is a community committed to the values of diversity, but it is not a diverse community.

FCC shares with the United Church of Christ a gap between its ideal of diversity and the reality of congregational make-up. As an institution, the UCC is committed to being a diverse multicultural and multiracial denomination, but most of our congregations are predominantly white. It has been nearly 50 years since Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke about the segregation in American churches: “We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this.”⁴ Sadly, this is still the case in many mainline Protestant churches today and First Community Church is no exception.

A dedication to interfaith dialogue and relationship building is in the DNA of FCC. The church has a history of creating and hosting interfaith dialogue events and worship services, as well as a theological position that God has infinite ways of revealing God’s self to creation; God is not limited to one faith tradition’s beliefs and perspectives.

⁴ From the Archives and Regional History Collections of Western Michigan University. Dr. Martin Luther King’s WMU Speech, 1963, <http://www.wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/MLK.pdf> (accessed January 4, 2014).

At FCC, we not only *respect* other faith traditions, but also *expect* that we can learn from them. Part of the high school curriculum includes visits to a mosque, synagogue, and other Christian churches to introduce the young people to other faith traditions. Visitors to the website or the church frequently remark on our language about “recognizing other pathways to the Divine”; they find this surprising in a Christian church. For some it is refreshing; for others it can be off-putting. The FCC mission statement says, “because we believe all people are included in God’s unconditional grace” we:

Strive to follow the path of Jesus Christ, while recognizing other pathways to the Divine.

Encourage each person’s spiritual journey, embracing a variety of spiritual disciplines.

Understand that the words we use to express our faith are to be lived out by loving and compassionate action.

Take the Bible seriously, not literally, finding more grace in the search for meaning than in absolute certainty.

Agree to differ, unite to serve, and resolve to love.⁵

FCC supports a variety of missions, including a television ministry, which airs the weekly sermon on the CW network. The broadcast is understood as a mission of the church; it was begun to offer an alternative to the predominantly fundamentalist religious programming on television. Viewership averages about 10,000 persons (7,000 households) per week.⁶ Other mission activities include a commitment by FCC to cook and serve dinner at a local homeless shelter (approximately 125 meals) on Monday nights every week of the year. FCC has a food pantry, called Heart to Heart, that provides groceries for thousands of families each year. In addition, the church supports an

⁵ www.FCchurch.com. (accessed May 19, 2012).

⁶ Data provided by Randy Rocke, FCC Director of Mission Through Media.

orphanage and medical facility in Kenya (Rafiki), a humanitarian organization in India (Deep Griha Society) and Friends of the Homeless in Columbus. The church maintains an ongoing relationship with the Gladden Community House, which was established as a settlement house by Dr. Gladden and his wife in 1905.

CHAPTER 2 CHALLENGE

Several members of the congregation, independently of one another, presented the challenge for this demonstration project. My ministry took a remarkable turn in August 2010. I saw a Gainesville, Florida “pastor” on television, talking about his plan to burn Qur’ans on the tenth anniversary of September 11, 2001, and I decided to preach about it the following Sunday. I spoke about the importance of respect for other faith traditions and humility about our own. I preached that Terry Jones and his plan were profoundly unchristian and completely at odds with the gospel message:

Now I can assure you there is nothing in the Gospels; there is nothing in the teaching of Jesus Christ that says anything about burning the holy texts of other faith traditions. It is not there. This proposed burning of the Qur’an is obscene.

It is not the work of peace.
It is not the work of understanding.
It is not the work of bridge building.
It is insanity.

We can only imagine what Jesus might have said about Pastor Terry Jones and his Burn the Quran campaign. I think he would say, “This has got to stop.”⁷

The sermon went viral on YouTube and received media coverage in Columbus and around the world. While Terry Jones was promoting his Qur’an burning as an observance

⁷ Excerpt from author’s sermon, “Pecking Order” on Luke 14:1, 7-11. It was delivered at First Community Church on August 29, 2010.

of the September 11th attacks, I urged parishioners to consider their Muslim neighbors and those of Islamic faith who died on 9/11.

When you think of Muslim people, think of individuals. Think of the professor at Ohio State, the engineer at Honda, the teacher at the elementary school down the street. I think of the X-ray tech at my doctor's office. She takes good care of my creaky knee.

When you think of Muslim people, remember those who lost their lives on September 11th. Not the hijackers—there were fewer than 20 of them.

When you think of Muslim people, remember Mohammad Slaman Hamdani. He was born in Pakistan and came to the United States as a small child with his parents. He played high school football. He attended college. He took a job as an ambulance driver.

He was 23-years old when he died at Ground Zero, trying to rescue people and save lives.

When you think of Muslim people, remember Mohammed Salahuddin Chowdhury. He was a waiter at Windows on the World, a restaurant at the top of the World Trade Center. He died that day and his wife had their baby two days later.

When you think of Muslim people, remember Rhama Salie. She was a woman, 28-years old. Her neighbors described her as friendly and outgoing and generous. She was seven months pregnant when she died on American Airlines flight #11.⁸

The response from the pews was overwhelmingly positive; church members expressed appreciation that I said from the pulpit what they had been thinking. In the sermon I said, “So what can you do? How can you respond to this new wave of fear and suspicion, what’s being called “Islamophobia”? One idea might be to talk *to* Muslim

⁸ 9/11 Victims' names and stories from www.CNN.com. (Accessed 27 August 2010.)

people rather than *about* them.”⁹ The idea resonated with a number of congregants who came to me saying, “I want to do this, but I don’t know any Muslims to talk to.” More than a few of the congregants had attended interfaith events and said they appreciated listening to the dialogue, but wanted an opportunity to connect with people of the Islamic faith in a more personal manner.

While the church’s response was predominantly positive, I have also received anti-Muslim emails and anonymous newspaper articles in my church mailbox, detailing the “Islamist threat.” Some individuals believed I was acting out of naïveté and that it was their responsibility to help me fully understand the threat. They are good and decent people who are afraid, misinformed and unable to separate the faith tradition of Islam from the acts of terrorists.

Overall, reaction to the sermon was supportive, demonstrating that First Community Church is what Walter Brueggemann, in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, would call a:

...social environment [that is] more hospitable than others to prophets and more likely to be the locus of their emergence. [It is] a community of peculiar discourse with practices of memory, hope, and pain that keep healthy human life available in the face of all the ‘virtual reality’ now on offer in dominant culture. [It is a community with] a shared willingness to engage in gestures of resistance and acts of deep hope...with an evangelical will for public engagement.¹⁰

⁹ A similar phrase is found in the literature of family systems theory, which was pioneered by Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist who treated people with schizophrenia in the 1950s. “We should do more talking *to* each other and less talking *about* each other” is a quote from an anonymous women involved in a family conflict and appears in Bowen’s book, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. (New York: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993), 513. While Bowen was primarily concerned with families, his work became part of a larger body of writing and thinking about the character and causes of conflict.

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd Edition (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), xvi-xvii.

As such a community, FCC was ready and willing to receive my message, a message that embodied Brueggemann's notion of prophetic imagination: "Prophetic imagination as it may be derived from Moses is concerned with matters political and social, but it is as intensely concerned with matters linguistic (how we say things) and epistemological (how we know what we know)."¹¹ How we know what we know about Islam and its followers, and how we talk about it, was precisely the point of my sermon, and it was preached to a particular community in a particular time and place. Such particularity is a hallmark of the prophet's message according to Brueggeman: "No prophet ever sees things under the aspect of eternity. It is always partisan theology, always for the moment, always for the concrete community, satisfied to see only a piece of it all and to speak out of that at the risk of contradicting the rest of it."¹²

In Brueggemann's schema, imagination comes first and realization follows: "The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The *imagination* must come before the *implementation*."¹³ (Emphasis original.) The process of imagination to implementation is what happened as the congregation responded to the sermon and the demonstration project unfolded. The findings presented in chapter nine indicate that, regarding Islam and FCC's neighbors who are Muslim, the demonstration project did

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹² Ibid., 16.

¹³ Ibid., 40.

“present an alternative consciousness that can energize the community to fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality.”¹⁴

As discussed in chapter one, the community surrounding FCC is predominantly white, with a religious makeup that is almost entirely Protestant or Catholic. Parishioners who work in a diverse environment, such as The Ohio State University or several of the larger public school districts, engage with people of other ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. Others, particularly those who are retired, do not have many opportunities to meet people who are different from them. For the most part, it is not a question of narrow-mindedness or lack of willingness; it is more a function of time and place.

Research published in the book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* demonstrates the power of an individual knowing just one other person from a group of “others.”¹⁵ Knowing just one person proved to be an important inroad to reducing stereotypes and fear of a group of people who are different from oneself. (See chapter four for discussion of Putnam and Campbell’s findings.) As Dagmar Grefe writes, “It is not belief systems, but people who encounter each other.”¹⁶

Members of my site team shared this longing to create opportunities for people to connect with each other. Two of the site team members, Justin Fields and Laura Adkins work as school counselors in large multiracial, multicultural school districts. Both have training in cultural diversity, both engage regularly with Muslim students, yet both

¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

¹⁵ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 526.

¹⁶ Dagmar Grefe, *Encounters For Change: Interreligious Cooperation in the Care of Individuals and Communities* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), xviii.

expressed a need and desire to learn more. Another site team member, Makenzie Adkins, was a high school junior, active in a diversity dialogue group at school. Makenzie said their best sessions are when young people “just laugh and talk together.” So, how could such a connection be achieved for members of my congregation at First Community Church?

With the increase in anti-Muslim attitudes since September 11, 2001, there is an immediate and urgent need for projects to reduce stereotypes and increase understanding. The United States was at war in Muslim countries for more than a decade; the cost in human life for people of all faiths in the wars in Iran and Afghanistan must cause God great sadness. Some members of FCC are unable to distinguish between terrorists who claim God to *justify* their actions and decent people of Islamic faith who rely on God to *guide* their actions. The stereotypes are fed by the media and the Internet in particular, where xenophobic stories are easily found and have the appearance of credibility. The stereotypes are also fed in the political world by groups and individuals who seek to fan the flames of mistrust and fear for their own purposes.

Islamic scholar Khaleel Mohammed describes common Muslim stereotypes from the perspective of personal experience:

The news media have conditioned us to accept a Muslim as a bearded, scowling, humorless Middle Easterner, often a disguised terrorist, speaking with a specific accent and spewing hateful rhetoric. I am the very antithesis of such a caricature. I deeply identify with North American culture; I take pride in dressing in a manner that is normal for the continent, and I definitely do not spout hate. The closest I come to being a

terrorist is that some might consider my sense of humor lethal. The ability to poke fun at myself is one of the easiest ways to establish rapport.¹⁷

I share Mohammed's conviction that humor is an effective method of making connections and will discuss how humor was incorporated in the demonstration project in chapter six.

Diana Eck describes the gap in understanding between Christians and Muslims in her portrait of the evolving religious landscape in the United States, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. She says it is the “most misunderstood” of America’s religious traditions.

...knowing each other is not easy in the American context. Misinformation about Islam and, even more, sheer ignorance of Islam, are common. Even while American Muslims create mainstream mosques and Islamic centers, register to vote, and become active participants in the American democratic process, newspapers bring to American homes the images of Islamic Jihad and other terrorist organizations, their rifle-toting leaders and their hideouts, creating a view of Islam as dangerous, subversive, highly political, and anti-American. When a terrorist attack occurs elsewhere in the world, American Muslims may well be among the first to condemn the attack and to speak of terrorism as anti-Islamic, but their voices are usually not heard, let alone magnified by the popular press.¹⁸

Eck could easily be speaking about the demonstration project (she is not) when she speaks about the power of personal, one-to-one connection: “Getting to know each other may seem a modest goal, but in a world supercharged with mutual stereotypes—Muslims, Christians, and Jews provide enough examples—it is a good start. Many Muslims are convinced that America is the place to make that start.”¹⁹ Eck observes that something as simple as how we greet each other

¹⁷ Khaleed Mohammed, “The Art of Heeding,” in *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*, ed. Rebecca Kratz Mays, 75-86 (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 2008), 81.

¹⁸ Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 222-223.

¹⁹ Ibid., 223.

can alter relationships. The traditional Islamic greeting is *salaam alaikum*, which means “peace be with you.” Eck reflects on the power of these words: “I know from experience what a pleasure it is to exchange this greeting of peace with Muslims and what a difference it makes in establishing a tone for relationship. My own ‘hellos’ and ‘how do you dos’ feel pale by comparison....Like anything, it may become merely habitual, but like all good habits, it instills an inner disposition.”²⁰

FCC is situated in a community that is ideally suited for Muslim-Christian bridge building. The Noor Islamic Cultural Center (NICC) is located just seven miles from our locations and we essentially serve the same area of northwest Columbus. The concerns of our people are essentially the same: raising families, paying the mortgage, saving for college, serving the community and participating in a faith community. The challenge is perhaps not so much to discuss and understand differences, as it is to recognize the many beliefs, convictions and values we share.

Author Mahmoud Ayoub would approve of a Christian-Muslim bridge building project in the heart of the Midwest. In writing about the historical foundations of Christian/Muslim conflict, Ayoub maintains the violence of today’s world is not the result of theology and religious disagreement, but is more the result of disparities in wealth and opportunity. The issue is not “God, revelation and Moses...but land, oil and the destiny of peoples.” Because of global inequities, Ayoub claims the ideal point of contact and dialogue is here and now:

²⁰ Ibid., 224.

The purpose of dialogue ought to be better understanding, peaceful coexistence, and the establishment of a fellowship of faith among people of faith. This is only possible among people enjoying the same standard of security, economic well-being, and social equality in all respects. This ideal cannot be achieved between the rich and technologically advanced West and the Muslims of the so-called Third World. It must begin in Europe and North America where Muslims and Christians share the factory workbench, the school, community center, and even the cemetery.²¹

In our community, there is the opportunity for connection with Muslim people who are neighbors both geographically and metaphorically. The demonstration project goal was for 50 members of FCC to have a personal encounter with a Muslim member of the community, report they have a greater understanding of Islam and feel more comfortable around their Muslim neighbors. Simply, the goal was to create an opportunity for Muslims and Christians to “rub elbows” with each other and realize their common humanity.

²¹ Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays On Dialogue*, ed. Irfan A. Omar (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007), 58.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTION: LOVE THE NEIGHBOR

On September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI made a speech to scientists at the University of Regensburg, Germany, that led to protests around the world and the most significant Muslim-Christian dialogue of the twentieth century. The speech was entitled “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections.” In the Regensburg address (or the “Regensburg debacle,” as it is called by Ibrahim Kalin of Georgetown University), the Pope asserted Islam does not allow for independent or rational thinking and instead demands followers submit to a “stern and rule-driven God.” Additionally, the Pope suggested that Islam is spread through force and violence instead of love and compassion.²² Muslim scholars, 138 of them, responded immediately with “An Open Letter to the Pope”; the broader “A Common Word” initiative was to follow a year later. Ibrahim Kalin was one of the Muslim scholars who created the Common Word document as well as one of the signatories. He writes: “On both counts, Christians, the Pope implied, cannot have religious or theological dialogue with Muslims. Even though Pope Benedict was quoting a polemical medieval source about Islam, it was clear that his typology about religions accorded to Islam only a place as a culture, not religion.”²³

²² Ibrahim Kalim, “Seeking Common Ground Between Muslims and Christians” in *A Common Ground and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations*, John Borelli, ed. (Georgetown University: ACMCU Occasional Papers, 2009), 7.

²³ Ibid.

The speech set off angry protests in the Muslim world; churches in the West Bank were firebombed and a nun killed in Somalia in a shooting that news reports said, “...may have been connected to strong criticism of the speech by a radical Somali cleric.”²⁴ Five days later, the Pope issued a statement apologizing for the upset his speech caused: “I am deeply sorry for the reactions in some countries to a few passages of my address at the University of Regensburg, which were considered offensive to the sensibility of Muslims. These in fact were a quotation from a Medieval text, which do not in any way express my personal thought.”²⁵

Regardless of the Pope’s intent, the Regensburg Address led to what has been hailed as the most important step in interfaith dialogue in 50 years. “A Common Word Between Us” was “a thoughtful, creative response of a broadly representative group of Muslim scholars, a moment of grace and invitation, opening profound and major possibilities and opportunities.” The Right Reverend William O. Gregg, a bishop in the Episcopal Church, says the document’s approach makes its own statement. It does not minimize or overlook authentic differences between Christianity and Islam, but choosing “common ground as the starting point, and specifically our common word, love, is in itself an act of love and faithfulness that possesses immense power to connect.”²⁶

According to the Common Word website, signatories to the message come from every

²⁴ “Pope Sorry for Offending Muslims,” *news.bbc.co.uk*, 17 December 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5353208.stm>.

²⁵ Peter Popham, “Pope’s apology fails to placate Muslims as violence goes on,” *independent.co.uk*, 18 December 2006, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/popes-apology-fails-to-placate-muslims-as-violence-goes-on-416467.html>.

²⁶ William O. Gregg, “The Power of Finding Common Ground” in *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of “A Common Word,”* Waleed El-Ansary and David K. Linnan, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 31.

denomination and school of thought in Islam and every major Islamic country or region in the world is represented.²⁷

In “A Common Word,” and the answer from Christian leaders that became known as the Yale Response (published in the New York Times in November 2007), Muslims and Christians hold in common the love of God and love of neighbor. Love of God and neighbor are fundamental to both faith traditions and both are found repeatedly in Christian and Muslim sacred texts. Daniel Madigan, a Jesuit priest and another member of the Georgetown group, says, “A Common Word” is really about our common faith...

...since it is based upon the conviction that it is conceivable for us to seek a word in common about God and about how things are between God and humanity. We could satisfy ourselves with a minimal word in common—a few agreed statements of ethical principle—yet the divine command in Qur'an 3:64 would have us come to a word in common about the most important thing of all, the worship of nothing other than God: Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you, that we worship none but God, and that we do not associate anything with Him, and do not take each other for lords, beside God.

One of the responses to “A Common Word” was a letter written by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, entitled “A Common Word for the Common Good.” He spoke first about the importance of identifying common ground in the two traditions and then listed five areas in which progress is possible:

- 1) Focus upon love and praise of God
- 2) Love of neighbor that is rooted in love of God
- 3) Grounding of this interfaith exchange in scriptures so that both traditions speak from that which is central and authoritative to each
- 4) Respecting and discussing differences to avoid mutual fear and suspicion

²⁷ Introduction to a Common Word Between Us and You. www.acommonword.com/introduction-to-a-common-word-between-us-and-you. (Accessed October 20, 2012).

5) Honoring a shared responsibility towards humanity and creation.²⁸

The idea of a common word goes back to stories about the Prophet Muhammad himself. One of the earliest commentators on the Qur'an writes about a common word as a bridge that was intended by God to narrow the gap caused by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, that God is three-in-one. In the twenty-first century, this remains a point of conflict for many Muslims because of their conviction that there is no God but God. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari was an Islamic scholar writing in the tenth century. He suggests a debate with Christians over the Trinity prompted the common word verse in the Qur'an. Zeki Saritoprak, of John Carroll University, tells the story:

A group of Christians...came to the Prophet from the region of Najran. According to this story, these Christians debated with the Prophet about the nature of Jesus and were unwilling to accept Muhammad's invitation to consider Jesus as purely human rather than divine. The Qur'ani Jesus is 'a messenger of God and kalima [word] from God, which was sent into Mary...He is not God: 'Believe in God and God's messengers, but do not say, 'Three' (4:171). According to al-Tabari, upon Najran Christians' unwillingness to accept this Islamic understanding of Jesus, God asked the prophet to offer them a suggestion that would be easier for them to accept. This suggestion is to call the Christians to kalima-tun sawa, a common ground between them: the belief in the one God.²⁹

Proceeding from this ancient commentary, it can be concluded that Muslims and Christians in the contemporary world should also begin with beliefs and convictions they share. Saritoprak points to a detail of grammar that is significant for our discussion here, the use of the indefinite article. "In most places where it appears, the [Arabic word] takes

²⁸ Rowan Williams quoted in "The Message of a Common Word," *A Common Word Between Us and You: Five Year Anniversary Edition, English Monograph Series No. 20.* (Amman: MABDA, 2012), 29.

²⁹ Zeki Saritoprak. "How Commentators of the Qur'an Define 'Common Word'" in *A Common Ground and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations*, John Borelli, ed. (Georgetown University: ACMCU Occasional Papers, 2009), 37.

the form of the indefinite noun: that is to say, not necessarily ‘*the* word’ (al-kalima) but ‘*a* word’ (kalima-tun). The use of the word as indefinite suggests the large scope of the statement over which Muslims and Christians can come together.”³⁰

Daniel Madigan urges the image of “mutual hospitality” to describe the atmosphere and spirit of the conversation between Christians and Muslims that is invited by “A Common Word.” He writes: “When this kind of hospitality is mutual, something new emerges, and what starts out as doing theology *in the presence of* the other becomes doing theology *together with* the other.”³¹ The emergence of something new is the hallmark of the Common Word initiative and why we can reasonably hope and expect that something new will come out of it as well. “Something new” pertains not only to what we learn about the faith and tradition of the other, but also new learning and richer understanding of our own sacred texts and traditions.

HE Shaykh Ali Goma'a holds one of the highest positions in Sunni Islam and speaks about the “unprecedented success” of “A Common Word”:

“A Common Word” was not intended to reduce our religions to an artificial unity on the basis of the two principles (love of God and love of neighbor), rather it was only an attempt to create an essential common ground deeply rooted in the shared Abrahamic tradition in order to put an end to the misgivings between us that act as stumbling blocks in the way of our respecting one another. The goal was to affirm that religion is part of the solution, not the problem. The truth is that the two principles (love

³⁰ Ibid., 36.

³¹ Daniel A. Madigan, “Mutual Theological Hospitality” in *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of “A Common Word,”* Waleed El-Ansary and David K. Linnan, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 59.

of God and love of neighbor) serve as the shared standard of behavior concerning what we expect from others and how we behave ourselves.³²

Shaykh Goma'a wisely notes that the efforts toward peace between Muslims and Christians require not only commitment, grace, openness and understanding, but also knowledge about one another. Westerners need, he says, "...essential and precise knowledge of our religion in order to correct the notion the Western world has of Islam thereby removing the darkness and clamor that surrounds it."³³ HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad spoke of the value of knowledge on both sides, when he proposed an interfaith harmony week to the UN General Assembly: "The misuse or abuse of religions can thus be a cause of world strife, whereas religions should be a great foundation for facilitating world peace. The remedy for this problem can only come from the world's religions themselves. Religions must be part of the solution, not part of the problem."³⁴ Learning from each other is clearly part of the solution; for more than a few Muslims and Christians learning that common ground exists at all is a starting point.

While the need for knowledge is "urgent," Miroslav Volf reminds us that "...acquiring knowledge of the other is a complicated affair. It is hard to pick out 'knowledge' from mere opinion [and] 'knowledge' always comes bearing somebody's stamp on it." Volf urges us toward a broader understanding of what we mean by

³² HE Shaykh ali Goma'a, "A Common Word Between Us and You" in *Muslim and Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of "A Common Word,"* Waleed El-Ansary and David K. Linnan, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 16-17.

³³ Ibid., 16.

³⁴ HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, quoted in "The Uncommonality of 'A Common Word'" *A Common Word Between Us and You: Five Year Anniversary Edition, English Monograph Series No. 20.* (Amman: MABDA, 2012), 14.

knowledge: “Prejudices are born of ignorance, self-absorption, resentment, and fear—all stances incompatible with the active love of neighbor enjoined on Muslims and Christians alike by their common God. The best way to fight prejudice is by knowledge, not just knowledge of people’s beliefs and practices, but knowledge of their feelings and hopes, their injuries and triumphs as well.”³⁵

To understand another’s feelings, hopes, hurts and loves is to move the relationship from stranger to something different such as friend or neighbor. In his seminal essay, “The Stranger,” sociologist Georg Simmel says that in the case of the stranger, an individual is conscious of...

...having only the absolutely general in common [which] has exactly the effect of putting the emphasis on that which is not common. For a stranger to the country, the city, the race, and so on, what is stressed is again nothing individual, but alien origin, a quality which he has, or could have, in common with many other strangers. For this reason strangers are not really perceived as individuals, but as strangers of a certain form.³⁶

In Simmel’s characterization, the stranger loses his or her individual identity, thus losing his or her humanity in the eyes of another. The command from Jesus to love the neighbor is a command to see and value the stranger as an individual human being and to understand that there is more to him or her than “alien origin.”

Theologian Kosuke Koyama coined the term “neighborology,” arguing that people need good neighbors more than theology, ontology or Christology. What they need is neighborology. Koyama points to John Baillie’s understanding of the reality of the neighbor: “Reality is what I ‘come up against,’ what takes me by surprise, the other-than-

³⁵ Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 203-204.

³⁶ Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 148.

myself which pulls me up and obliges me to reckon with it and adjust myself to it...”³⁷

For Koyama, God’s reality and the neighbor’s reality are mirror images: “Our sense of the presence of God will be distorted if we fail to see God’s reality in terms of our neighbor’s reality. And our sense of our neighbor’s reality will be disfigured unless seen in terms of God’s reality.”³⁸ One observes in the neighbor the blood and sweat, tears and laughter of human existence. Koyama argues that from the perspective of the neighbor, our love for the neighbor takes precedence over our love of God. He points to 1 John 4:20 as the text that illustrates the point: “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” In this verse brother—neighbor—comes before God.

Desmond Tutu speaks about love of the neighbor in the context of the fight against apartheid in South Africa, a brutal system that defined “otherness” as the color of a person’s skin. Tutu says it is impossible to love God and hate one’s neighbor at the same time: “An encounter with God is an encounter with someone who says, ‘If you love me then the way to express that is by loving your neighbor, because how can you say you have seen God, that you love God, and yet you hate your brother or sister?’”³⁹ Tutu says because human beings are created in the image of God, “...each one of us is a God-carrier. And so to ill-treat a human being is not just a criminal act, it is of religious concern, because it is blasphemy.”

³⁷ John Baillie, *The Sense of the Presence of God* (London: Oxford University Press: 1962), 33.

³⁸ Kosuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition, Revised and Expanded* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 65.

³⁹ Allister Sparks & Mpho Tutu, *Tutu: Authorized* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 65.

Namsoon Kang situates the neighbor within the context of “cosmopolitanism” and an understanding of the individual as a citizen of the world (cosmos). Cosmopolitanism is less concerned with the boundaries of society, culture and the nation-state, and more concerned with the wider human community and the individuals that comprise it:

Unless we acknowledge individual humans as our neighbors, and their rights as universal rights, we will likely reduce them to impersonal numbers. Regarding one’s neighbors as oneself is the core of cosmopolitan rights and hospitality. Cosmopolitanism advances ethics as fundamental welcoming, unconditional receptivity for the other, and a notion of responsibility for the other, our neighbor.⁴⁰

For Kang, cosmopolitanism cannot be separated from a concern for justice and compassion for all of creation, both human and non-human. The concern for justice aligns cosmopolitanism with the Biblical understanding of neighbor love and with Paul’s theology of the oneness of humanity, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizen with the saints and also members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:19) Kang writes: “The spirit of cosmopolitanism also requires us to radically extend the category of ‘neighbor,’ to cross and transcend various borders, and to embrace every human person and, furthermore, nature itself, as our ‘neighbors.’”⁴¹

Kang calls for a radical affirmation of the “other” and a radical inclusion of the “other” into the community of “neighbor” and that, she says, leads to a theology of “radical neighborly love.”⁴² Who the other or stranger is, depends on one’s location and

⁴⁰ Namsoon Kang, “Toward a Cosmopolitan Theology: Constructing Public Theology from the Future,” In *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* eds. Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 266.

⁴¹ Ibid., 267-268.

⁴² Ibid., 273.

perspective; the label of “other” can apply to gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, culture, citizenship, class, or any other characteristic that becomes associated in some way with one’s identity. Kang writes:

Cosmopolitan theology invites us to fundamentally ask and redefine who “the other” is and who “the neighbor” is in our time. Once the “neighbor” was very ethnocentric in Israelite/Jewish tradition, and then became “reliocentric” in Christian tradition through its invention of the “religious other” in its construction of doctrine, theology, and institutionalized practice....Cosmopolitan theology is based on a Christology that envisions Jesus Christ as the one who is ever affirming the “other” – the racialized other, gendered other, sexualized other, religious other, ethnic other, and so forth.⁴³

In the first century, critics of Jesus accused him of associating with the “wrong sort of people” – sinners, tax collectors, lepers, prostitutes – a notion that will soon lead us to Jesus’ interpretation of the First Testament call to love the neighbor, who could be anybody. It should be noted that many Christians have a view of Jews in antiquity that is a caricature of a group of law-obsessed followers who believed only in an angry, vengeful, punishing God. Like any caricature, it is an exaggerated and misleading portrait of a faithful people. In an essay on the law in Jewish life, Jonathan Klawans writes, “When it comes to understanding the Hebrew Testament in its Jewish context, few topics are as controversial, confusing, or complicated as the Law. Indeed, the stereotypically negative charge of Jewish *legalism* – tedious adherence to ancient rituals mixed with a misguided fascination with legal minutiae – has not fully evaporated from Christian

⁴³ Ibid., 273.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Klawans, *The Law*. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 515.

critiques of Judaism, whether popular or scholarly.”⁴⁴ Stereotypes about the law notwithstanding, there were norms about who associated with whom:

Like most societies, first-century Judaism was ordered by boundaries with specific rules regarding how Jews should treat Gentiles or Samaritans, how priests should relate to Israelites, how men should treat women, and so on. Because the boundaries allowed for certain groups to establish their positions, power, and privilege, maintaining the boundaries was vital to social order. It was a religious duty.⁴⁵

As we will see below, Jesus broadened and extended the interpretation of what it means to love the neighbor beyond what is suggested in the Hebrew text. Leviticus refers to “your people,” which to a Jew in antiquity would mean the covenant First Testament community. “The context of this command in Leviticus makes clear that ‘neighbor’ refers to one’s fellow Israelite. In the book of *Jubilees*, the patriarchs similarly urge love for one’s brothers, that is fellow Israelites.”⁴⁶ Scholar Amy-Jill Levine says in both the First and Second Testaments, “neighbor” can be interpreted narrowly, as the person living next door (in a village or city) or in a wider, metaphorical context and she urges a distinction between legal interpretations of neighbor and the broader interpretation that would include the moral imperative to welcome the alien and the stranger. In either case she says, regarding the Samaritan, enemy of the Jews, the definition of neighbor is not the

⁴⁵ *New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol 9.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 229.

⁴⁶ Collins, 574.

point. “The issue is not ‘who is my neighbor?’ but can we recognize that the enemy might be our neighbor and can we accept this disruption of our stereotypes?”⁴⁷

The neighbor motif is not central in the Qur'an as it is in the Bible; however, for Muslims the love of neighbor is inseparable from the love of God. “Muhammad said, ‘None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself.’ The ‘Common Word’ explains: ‘Love of the neighbor is an essential and integral part of faith in God and of love of God, because in Islam without love of the neighbor there is no true faith in God and no righteousness.’”⁴⁸ The record of the sayings and actions of Muhammad, the Hadith, point to the important status of the neighbor:

The best friend in the sight of Allah is he who is the well-wisher of his companions, and the best neighbor is one who behaves best towards his neighbors.

When you prepare the broth, add water to that and give that (as a present) to your neighbor.

A man once asked the Prophet: "How can I know when I do well and when I do ill?" The Prophet replied: "When you hear your neighbors say you have done well, you have done well; and when you hear them say you have done ill, you have done ill."

He is not a believer, who eats his fill while his neighbor is hungry.⁴⁹

The Second Testament text that represents the common word between Muslims and Christians is found in Luke chapter 10:27, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and

⁴⁷ Amy-Jill Levine, “Parable of the Good Samaritan.” Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 123.

⁴⁸ Volf, 29.

⁴⁹ Hadith verses from www.islamawareness.net. (Accessed December 18, 2013).

your neighbor as yourself.”⁵⁰ Similar texts are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, but only in Luke are the love commands followed by the story of the Good Samaritan. In the earlier Gospel verses, it is Jesus who is talking. In Luke, it is a lawyer who asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life and (like many good teachers) Jesus answers a question with another question, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

The first section of the verse, about loving God totally and completely with one’s entire self, is deeply rooted in both Jesus’ and the lawyer’s Jewish tradition. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which begins with “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” The verses are known as the *Shema* and are repeated in Jewish prayers in the morning and evening, by every adult Jewish male.⁵¹ The call to love the neighbor is also rooted in Jewish tradition and is found in Leviticus 19:18, “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” John Nolland writes that the combining of the love commandments was not a “novel” idea in the first century: “The attempt to identify fundamental principles that would encompass the whole will of God is as old as the OT itself...and continued to play an active role in Jewish thought. Also there is no doubt that the call for love of neighbor, which derives from Lev 19:18, had come to occupy a significant place in Jewish ethical summary well before the time of Jesus. At the same time, the call to love of God, which in our texts reflects the wording of Deut 6:4-5 and which occurs again and

⁵⁰ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, augmented 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: a Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 573.

again in the OT, was constantly kept before the ordinary Jew by [its] place in the *Shema*, which was recited daily as part of Jewish prayer practice.”⁵²

Nolland reminds us that Jesus’ own life and ministry is the best example of the all-encompassing love of God we see here: “Jesus’ call for love of God has its best commentary in Jesus’ own passion for God, his intimacy with God, and his fidelity to God; just as his call for love of neighbor has its best commentary in the life of this friend of tax collectors and sinners, who saw the service of others as his sacred calling.”⁵³

In Mark (Mk 12:28-33), the question from one of the scribes is, “Which commandment is the first of all?” and Jesus is the one who responds with what has become known as the greatest commandment. Interestingly, the scribe follows with, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is not other.’” This verse is unmistakably similar to the *Shahada*, the prayer recited five times each day by Muslims that affirms the oneness of God, “I bear witness that there is no God but God.”

The complete and total love of God shared by Christians and Muslims, (and inherited by them from Judaism) is articulated by John Nolland, as he interprets the Luke text:

Loving God with the heart requires a response to God from the innermost center of our beings; loving God with our life (or soul, as it is often translated) brings in the place of the vital force that energizes us: our conscious “alive-ness”; loving with the strength introduces the element of energetic physical action; loving with the mind identifies the importance, beyond the emotional, of the thinking and planning processes, which the

⁵² John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 35b* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 580-581.

⁵³ Ibid., 585.

mind contributes.⁵⁴

Regarding the First Testament tradition, Adela Yarbro Collins says, “The consensus is that the two passages cited here, Deut. 6:5 and Lev 19:18, are not cited in combination in any ancient Jewish text. But this fact does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the double love-command goes back to the historical Jesus, because it is anticipated in substance and function in Jewish literature, especially texts written in Greek.”⁵⁵ Collins points to a section from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* that includes a love commandment: “Love the Lord and your neighbor, and show compassion for the poor and the weak.”

Collins says further that the original meaning of the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, was reinterpreted first by the writer of Deuteronomy and “this process was taken further by Greek-speaking Jews, especially Philo. Crucial to Philo’s summarizing characterizations of the Law was the influence of Greek tradition about the virtues. Greek literature typically summed up human duties under two categories, holiness ($\tauὸ\ ὅστον$)...and justice ($\tauὸ\ δίκαιον$).”⁵⁶ It requires little reach to connect the dots from holiness to love of God, and justice to love of neighbor. John Holland writes about the radical leap of Luke: “...we see that the challenge to love of God and of neighbor is readily available in the OT law, but that now the scope of neighbor-love is radically extended and the content of love of God is made concrete as engagement with Jesus and his teaching.” Holland, however, disagrees that there is Hellenistic influence in

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Collins, 566.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 566-567.

the passage, as he speaks about longer lists of expectations for Jewish covenant-keeping with God. “The settings within more extensive lists of requirements show that we are not dealing in the Hellenistic manner with a fundamental bifurcation between the realm of God and the human sphere...Hellenistic influence seems to be an unnecessary suggestion.”⁵⁷

In Luke, Jesus takes a leap and explodes the understanding of neighbor in the telling of the story of the Good Samaritan. Many interpreters view it as an *example parable*, i.e. a story illustrating an *example* of good and godly behavior. While a man lies naked, beaten and nearly dying in a ditch, both a priest and a Levite pass by without offering help. The one who does stop to help is the unlikely character of the Samaritan, thus providing an example of caring behavior to the neighbor. However, the message is a more radical one as argued by John Nolland and John Dominic Crossan. Crossan says the story of the Good Samaritan does far more than offer an example of good behavior; it challenges the hearer or reader to think and behave in a dramatically new, boundary-breaking manner. Crossan writes, “It is better understood as a challenge parable, a story that challenges listeners to think long and hard about their social prejudices, their cultural presumptions, and yes, even their most sacred religious traditions.”⁵⁸ Given the hostilities between Christians and Muslims around the world, Crossan’s notion of challenge is particularly appropriate to the question that sits at the center of this chapter, “How can a Muslim be my neighbor?”

⁵⁷ Nolland, 579-581.

⁵⁸ John Dominic Crossan, *The Power of Parable: How Fiction by Jesus Became Fiction About Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 62.

For Muslims and Christians to love each other as neighbor would seem unlikely in Gaza or in post-9/11 America. Joseph Fitzmyer observes that improbability is what catches our attention in the Luke story. It is “a certain in-built improbability (would a Jew normally regard a Samaritan as a model of kindness, picture him traveling in Judea, or think that a Judean innkeeper would trust him?)” That, says Fitzmyer, is not the point; this is not history, but narrative. Fitzmyer and Crossan use different language to talk about the Good Samaritan pericope, but make essentially the same point. Fitzmyer calls it an example story, illustrating a model for behavior “with radical demands and the approval/rejection of certain modes of behavior.”⁵⁹ He uses the word “example,” yet any example that makes “radical demands” is also by definition a challenge. Fitzmyer concludes that the neighbor is the one who *needs* help, not the one who helps.

The point of the story is summed up in the lawyer’s reaction, that a ‘neighbor’ is anyone in need with whom one comes into contact and to whom one can show pity and kindness, even beyond the bounds of one’s own ethnic or religious group... It is no longer whether the victims of the highway robbery could be considered legally a ‘neighbor’ to either the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan, but rather which one of them acted as a ‘neighbor’ to the unfortunate victim.⁶⁰

Here the meaning of “neighbor” shifts from where one is located to what action one takes; neighbor no longer refers to identity but behavior toward a fellow human being. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, in her essay on neighborology, puts it this way: “Compassion should result in life-giving action. An agitated womb should give birth to new life.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Parable of the Good Samaritan in *The Anchor Bible: the Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*. (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1985), 883.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 884.

⁶¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “The People Next Door,” in *The Agitated Mind of God: The Theology of Kosuke Koyama*, ed. Dale T. Irvin and Akintunde E. Akinade, 201-211 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 210.

The radical nature of the story is what catches Walter Brueggemann's attention as well. He says the behavior of the Samaritan represents an "alternative consciousness" that stands over and against the "dominant consciousness" of the culture:

Both the Samaritan and the father [from the parable of the prodigal son] are Jesus' peculiar articulation against the dominant culture, and so they stand as a radical threat. The Samaritan by his action judges the dominant way by disregard of the marginal. The ones who pass by, obviously carriers of the dominant tradition, are numbed, indifferent and do not notice. The Samaritan expresses a new way that displaces the old arrangements in which outcasts are simply out. The replacing of numbness with compassion, that is, the end of cynical indifference and the beginning of noticed pain, signals a social revolution.

Brueggemann concludes that compassion is the one thing the dominant culture cannot tolerate.⁶²

Returning to Crossan's analysis, what makes the challenge parable unique is the upending of expectations: "it is the 'good' people who fail to help and one of the 'bad' people who does. That is what challenges the given normalcy of audience expectations, hierarchical prejudices, and ethnic presuppositions."⁶³ It is a human tendency to see oneself in a story as one of the "good guys" and we are surprised or caught off guard when our understanding of ourselves, our motives and our ways of being in the world are turned on their head. For Crossan, this makes the challenge parable downright subversive. The challenge parables "humble our prejudicial absolutes...They push or pull us into pondering whatever is taken totally for granted in our world – in its cultural customs, social relations, traditional politics, and religious traditions."⁶⁴

⁶² Brueggemann, 90-91.

⁶³ Crossan, 59.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 63.

The Good Samaritan has become one of those phrases that is commonly used in the culture, often without understanding or even knowledge of its biblical roots. It is a way of talking about anyone who helps another; as Crossan says, it has become a redundant cliché.⁶⁵ A person who helps to change a flat tire or rescue a kitten in a tree is quickly named a Good Samaritan. These are good and caring actions, but they do not step beyond the norms for compassionate behavior and thus are not the radical interventions that the author of Luke envisions. Luke has something very different in mind: “a challenge, a provocation, a paradox, an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.”⁶⁶

It is important to note that while Luke speaks about the identities of the would-be helpers in the story (Priest, Levite, Samaritan), he says almost nothing about person in the ditch, other than that he is a man who has been brutally attacked and robbed of everything he has, including his basic human dignity. He could be anyone; he could be you or me. Luke refuses to let any of us off the hook; he offers no opportunity to separate ourselves from the suffering in the ditch and the need for help. “This is of a piece with that Jesus who is friend to the despised of his society and who brings good news to the poor. As well, the challenge here to the practical expression of love outside the bounds of group solidarity is in the family likeness of the radical call of Jesus to love of enemy.”⁶⁷

The perspective of the beaten, naked, abandoned one is a compelling interpretation offered by John Nolland: “It is from the perspective of the ditch where one lies helpless and battered, and in desperate need of help, that one should reflect upon the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁷ Nolland, 590.

question ‘who is my neighbor?’ Then one will know how wide the reach of neighbor love should extend when one is in a position to be handing out favors.”⁶⁸ As privileged, first-world North Americans, we almost cannot help but see ourselves in the Samaritan character, the one “standing over” with the power, ability and resources to help. Yet, Nolland argues, from that perspective we miss the point of the parable: “What is being commended is the victim’s perspective, not the example of the Samaritan. What he does is commendable, but from the perspective of the desperate victim it is self-evident that the law’s demand for love of neighbor should bridge to any needy human being; that its practice should not be restricted to a closed community, even if that closed community is the community of the divine covenant.”⁶⁹

Such outreach to any needy human being was demonstrated by members of the Baituz Zafar mosque in Queens, New York in September 2011. While watching live television news coverage immediately after the attack on the World Trade Center, members of the mosque felt called to assist in an immediate and practical way. They observed that many of the people running to escape the Ground Zero area had lost their shoes, so members of the mosque gathered giant bags of socks and headed, with their youth group, toward the site of the attack. Those who received the socks did not ask about the ethnicity, religion or motivation of the helpers; they were simply grateful to have covering for their cut and bruised feet. The members of a mosque reached out to fellow New Yorkers, demonstrating John Nolland’s thesis that “...it is the practice of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 592.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 595.

mercy that makes a passerby into a neighbor.” He concludes: “Who is my neighbor? Jesus suggests that we should answer that question from a vantage point of isolation and desperate need, and then make use of the same answer when we come at the question from a position of strength, when it is within our gift to be handing out favors, rather than receiving them.”⁷⁰

There is no sentimentality in the view from the ditch, which is as it should be from the perspective of Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr:

Let us love the neighbor, and more specifically our Muslim and Christian neighbors, not on the basis of mere sentimentality, which can weaken or strengthen over time, but on the never-changing foundation of the Truth. To live fully as a Muslim or Christian does not require anything less of us than loving the neighbor...and it requires us not to ask, ‘Is he or she one of us?’ but to recognize that, ‘He or she is one of His.’⁷¹

The changeability of human love versus that of God is beautifully articulated by another Muslim scholar, Habib Ali al-Jifri, who argues a love that transcends change and momentary circumstance is at the foundation of “A Common Word”:

I might love a neighbor because of his proximity to me or because of his generosity of some other likeable attributes I find in him, but these things can change and therefore that love might change. But the true understanding of love of neighbor, for which we came to this “Common Word” conference, is a type of love of neighbor that emerges from a great tree, the tree of the love of God. Love of God will lead us to love the creation of God. If you love the Creator, you will love what he created.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 596-597.

⁷¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr. “The Word of God: The Bridge Between Him, You and Us” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*. Miroslav Volf, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Bin Talal, and Melissa Yarrington, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 177.

The love of the Creator will lead to love of the creation. I love my neighbor because God chose my neighbor for me.⁷²

The interpretation that God's love must be the model for neighbor love is echoed in the Yale response to "A Common Word":

The nature of God's love informs the proper character of love of neighbor, including how Christians are to love their Muslim neighbors. First, since God's love is unconditional and indiscriminate, human beings ought to love all their neighbors, the ones who belong to their 'group' (whether familial, cultural, or religious) as well as those who do not, and those who are friendly to them as well as those who are not.⁷³

As in Christianity, there are many groups of Muslims with different approaches to their faith. Expressed in a lyrical form, a Sufi writer offers commentary about the love of neighbor. He uses the metaphor of a fruit at various stages of ripeness to talk about relationship:

We have been told, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." We have not been told to beat our neighbors, to kill them, or to cut them up. That will not ripen anyone...When we show someone love, compassion, trust, and friendship he will melt in our embrace. Affection evokes affection. So, let us embrace our neighbors as the Prophet has taught us. Let us share with them the things that Allah has given us. To live together in unity with all groups is the proof that we are all the children of Adam. Love your neighbor as yourself; don't take his land and kill him⁷⁴

The metaphor of a ripening process moves us toward process theology and the notion that the building of bridges between Muslim and Christians (indeed between all

⁷² Habib Ali al-Jifri. "Loving God and Loving Neighbor" in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*. Miroslav Volf, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Bin Talal, and Melissa Yarrington, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 84.

⁷³ Miroslav Volf, Joseph Cumming, and Melissa Yarrington. Commentary on "Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to *A Common Word Between Us and You*" Miroslav Volf, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Bin Talal, and Melissa Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians On Loving God and Neighbor* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 71.

⁷⁴ M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. *Islam & World Peace: Explanations of a Sufi* (Philadelphia: Fellowship Press, 1987), 145-146.

faith traditions) represents a step – a necessary step – in the coming of the reign of God on earth. Theologian Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki speaks about God “luring” us toward a new way of being:

God interacts with the creation of human culture by calling cultures toward increasingly complex forms of community...God calls us to modes of more complex and richer ways of surviving, living, caring, and making meaning. The goal of God's call within each culture is toward richness and inclusiveness of community.⁷⁵

Suchocki's thesis is that diversity is an essential element in the reign of God and that it began in the first moment of creation, when God saw darkness and created its opposite and complement: light. The process of process theology is God engaged with creation, participating with all of creation to live more fully in and with God and each other. To see God at work in the faith tradition of another and to affirm the sacred in that relationship is to fully live in the image of God or at least to move forward in the process.

This is not an ‘all-at-once’ creation; it is progressive, with the cumulative past providing the ever-new context in which the next stage of call and response can occur. God's call depends on creaturely response, and on the divine response to what the creature has done with the divine call. Given *that, this* is now possible.⁷⁶

It is the very essence of the stranger to be different, to live and believe differently. Yet the Bible and the Qur'an call us to welcome the stranger and to love the neighbor. There is no promise of sameness, no requirement of what Suchocki calls “own-kindness.” It is the difference that calls forth the best in us as neighbors as God envisions us to live.

⁷⁵ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *Divinity and Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 48-49.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 29.

In a word to Christians in particular, Suchocki suggests that, “God is involved incarnationally in every culture.”⁷⁷ The implication is that the person of Jesus is not the only vehicle by which God might have a presence of incarnation. She further argues that “God’s leading is also reflected in each culture’s various conceptual schemes.” From my perspective, God’s presence in all cultures and faith traditions is a given, but I recognize that is not a view shared by all. That is why the common ground approach of loving God and loving neighbor is so powerful.

For Suchocki, “A mark of God’s reign is our treatment of the ‘stranger within our gates.’ We are to care for the wellbeing of the stranger. In today’s world, the ‘strangers within our gates’ are the persons from different religious traditions.” The working model for love of neighbor is friendship:

Friendship requires forthrightness about who we are, and an eagerness to listen to who the other is. Friendship requires knowing one another, which requires witnessing to one another about our experiences, our beliefs. And friendship involves us working together for the common good of a world of peace, of sustainable lifestyles, of care for the planet and all its inhabitants. Friendship cannot happen by withdrawal into our tightly drawn circles; we must go forth, reach out, in love of God and neighbor.⁷⁸

In a healthy friendship, there is respect between two people; ideally one can be fully and honestly oneself, feeling secure that the self is appreciated and honored. There is no need to be something different or to hide one’s deepest feelings and concerns. The genuine giving of one’s true self is the great gift of relationship, friendship and even relationships between differing religious faiths. Again in a *healthy* friendship, while there

⁷⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 10-11.

are likely many things in common, there is not pressure to change or diminish oneself to maintain a norm of sameness. Furthermore, the perspectives of another – whether friend or stranger – can shine new light on how we think and what we believe.

Friendship toward the one who differs religiously does not call for a suspension of one's values; to the contrary, it calls for speaking ones values, and hearing the values of another. It calls for attempts at mutual understanding. Further, just as my outsider's view gives me a certain perspective on another's situation, it is so that the stranger's views offer a distinct perspective on my situation. It could be that I will learn more about my own Christianity in dialogue with this other than I ever could when my conversational partners are restricted to those who are like me.⁷⁹

So, what is the relationship between “A Common Word Between Us” and the valuing of difference? “A Common Word Between Us” provides a bridge, a connector, a place to start with common understanding, values and language. We begin with “A Common Word,” a shared word and Word that binds us together and reminds us that we are made of the same stuff, in the image of God. Depending on the time and place, both Muslims and Christians find themselves in the role of the strong, able neighbor standing above the ditch *and* the battered, weakened one lying in the ditch. Depending on the time and place, both Muslims and Christians find themselves on the inside and the outside, the native and the stranger. With “A Common Word” as the foundation, we are able to build, stretch and fortify our relationships and trust they can grow stronger, wherever we may be located in time and place and whatever the unknown and unpredictable pressures of the future.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 84.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTION: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

In 1990, Shirin Tahir-Kheli became the first Muslim ambassador for the United States. She tells a story about traveling to Alaska to make a speech. Afterward, a woman approached her and said, “Before today I didn’t know any Muslims. Now I’ve met you and you’re a Muslim *and* a woman. You seem like a friendly, intelligent person, so I guess Muslims are OK.” Tahir-Kheli remembers the incident with a chuckle, “That alone made it worth the overnight flight to Alaska.”⁸⁰

Tahir-Kheli’s story mirrors research reported in *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, the seminal work on religion in America. Researchers Robert Putnam and David Campbell spent six years surveying 3,000 Americans and visiting various congregations, as part of two Faith Matters surveys that were conducted in 2006 and 2007. The first was of a randomly selected national sample. The second survey followed up with interviews with as many of the same people as could be located. (The surveys were conducted by a research firm on behalf of Harvard University.) Putnam and Campbell write, “Interviewing people more than once has turned out to be extremely valuable in understanding religious change. Because of the dynamism in American

⁸⁰ Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli was first assigned as Ambassador to the United Nations in Special Political Affairs; later she was Senior advisor to the Secretary of State. In October 2013 she was serving as Senior Fellow for the Foreign Policy Institute at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. She told me this story at a meeting of the Columbus Council on Global Affairs on September 26, 2013.

religion, even the short period of time that elapsed between the first and second interviews provides insights into small but significant shifts in various aspects of Americans' religious lives.”⁸¹ The surveys found that when Americans feel warmly toward one member of a group they are inclined to feel more warmly toward an entire group, a prime example of social identity theory in action. “We are suggesting that having a religiously diverse social network leads to a more positive assessment of specific religious groups, particularly those with low thermometer scores. When birds of different feathers flock together, they come to trust one another.”⁸² Additionally, Putnam and Campbell found, their results were strikingly consistent:

“Knowing someone within a particular religious group means a more positive assessment of that group in general—whether you have known that someone for a long time or not. These results for the consequences of religious bridging are compelling evidence that the purported evidence of social contact—under the right conditions—are not merely a fuzzy-headed aspiration.”⁸³

Social Identity Theory

The question at the heart of social identity (SI) theory is, “Who is who, and what is what, and where do I fit in?” SI theory emerged in the 70s with the work of Henri Tajfel, a Jewish academic from Poland who survived the Nazi concentration camps. Like other social scientists, historians and theologians of his generation, Tajfel sought explanations for the Holocaust. “Together with many people of my generation, I share

⁸¹ Putnam and Campbell, 10-11.

⁸² Ibid., 526-527.

⁸³ Ibid., 529-530.

memories of a raging storm which—it seemed at the time—would never stop.”⁸⁴

Previously, human behavior had been explained through the psychology and pathology of individuals, but Tajfel believed there had to be more to it; he was convinced that something in the dynamics of group behavior could better explain the horrors of Nazi Germany. The focus on the individual was not enough, “This inter-individual emphasis neglects an important contributing aspect of an individual’s self-definition: the fact that he is a member of numerous social groups and that this membership contributes, positively or negatively, to the image that he has of himself.”⁸⁵

Categorizing, of people, experiences, or physical environments, is how we humans organize our reality; without the ability to identify patterns we could not negotiate our world. SI theory provides a schema for understanding how categories become stereotypes and have an impact on group identity, emotions and behaviors. It also shows a way forward by demonstrating how ingroups and outgroups can become one group with shared goals. (The superordinate identity will be discussed later in this chapter.) SI theory says the groups to which we belong tell us who we are, thus the “identity” in social identity. Belonging to a group (the ingroup) can give us a sense of importance and significance, while the presence of a group of others (the outgroup) can be threatening to our personal and communal sense of self. If the other also represents a threat to physical safety and security, the dynamic becomes even more powerful. Sociologist Richard Jenkins writes, “...the human world is unimaginable without some

⁸⁴ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 254.

means of knowing who others are and some sense of who we are...The perpetual bottom-line is that we can't live routine lives as humans without identification, without knowing—and sometimes puzzling about—who we are and who others are. This is true no matter where we are, or what our way of life or language.”⁸⁶ While categorization may be a natural strategy for navigating the world, it also lays the groundwork for attachment to the ingroup and a corresponding detachment or distancing from the outgroup, which becomes the first step toward a positive bias toward the ingroup and discrimination against the outgroup.⁸⁷ Henri Tajfel saw in his research that just in the process of making an us-them distinction, people come to see each other differently. “When category distinctions are salient, people perceptually enhance similarities within the group ('we're all much the same') and enhance differences among the groups ('we're different from them').”⁸⁸ The us-them separateness takes on a life of its own and the gap has a tendency to grow. Gordon Allport, in his classic work, *The Nature of Prejudice*, argues that without some form of intervention, separateness among groups tends to lead to more separateness, even without malicious intent: “People who stay separate have few channels of communication. They easily exaggerate the degree of difference between groups, and readily misunderstand the grounds for it. And, perhaps most important of all,

⁸⁶ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity, Third Edition*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 26-27.

⁸⁷ Marilyn Brewer, “Ingroup Identification and Intergroup Conflict” in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Resolution*, Richard Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2001), 20.

⁸⁸ Matthew J. Hornsey, “Society Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory: A Historical Review,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* (2008): 206.

the separateness may lead to genuine conflicts of interests, as well as to many imaginary conflicts.”⁸⁹

Gordon Allport and Characteristics of Contact

Allport was a psychologist who conducted his research in the midst of the civil rights movement in the United States and, like Tajfel, in the shadow of the Second World War. He developed a formula for contact between groups that could result in a reduction of prejudice. Allport’s theory says four characteristics of contact must be present. First, within the contact group everyone must share equal status. Second, Allport believed the outcome was “greatly enhanced” if the effort is supported by an acknowledged authority, such as the clergy or lay leadership of a congregation or the principal of a school. Third, to be successful, the contact must involve cooperative action (as opposed to competitive). Fourth, the contact experience must create the opportunity for personal acquaintance. Thomas Pettigrew, a student of Allport, expanded the formula to include a fifth element, the potential for friendship. As will be seen later in this paper, all of Allport’s characteristics of contact were included in the intervention phase of my demonstration project. Allport’s contact hypothesis has been supported by 203 studies in 25 countries involving 90,000 participants. In a meta-analysis of the research, Pettigrew and Tropp found that 94% of the studies support the theory and found that as intergroup contact increased, prejudice was reduced.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Cambridge: Perseus Books Publishing, 1979), 19.

⁹⁰ Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp, “Does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Recent meta-analytic findings,” In *Reducing prejudice and discrimination*, ed. S. Oskamp, (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000), 93-114.

Dagmar Grefe moves the theory directly into the arena of multifaith engagement. In her book *Encounters for Change: Interreligious Cooperation in the Care of Individuals and Communities*, Grefe points to faith traditions as both the source of misunderstanding and mistrust and a resource for productive relationship building. “Prejudice and bias contribute to tensions between different religious communities. Our separation and isolation from each other distorts our view of each other and reinforces tensions. The good news: religious communities can also help to ‘unmake’ prejudice.”⁹¹ (Here she echoes Allport who said, “The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice.”⁹²)

Grefe’s thesis is that while education is a helpful step in understanding each other, more substantial change happens when we have direct personal encounters. In the context of my project, I use the idiom “rub elbows” with each other.⁹³ Grefe describes it this way:

As we experience each other in small group settings as people, we can dispel the myths we hold about each other. As people of different religious paths encounter each other regularly in small groups, they have opportunities to disconfirm their stereotypes...and create new thinking, new feelings, and new behavior. The process of unmaking prejudice happens as a *byproduct* [emphasis mine] of shared activities. The point is that people of different groups come together, work together, and get to know each other as people in the process.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Grefe, 67.

⁹² Allport, 444.

⁹³ I recognize the irony of this particular idiomatic expression, given the necessary sensitivity to Muslim prohibitions about different genders having physical contact. Still, “rub elbows” communicates the spirit of what the project seeks to achieve.

⁹⁴ Grefe, 68.

Superordinate Identities and Goals

The pivot point for transformation in this process comes when Christians and Muslims recognize themselves as having a shared identity and shared goals. In the language of SI theory, this is a superordinate identity and superordinate goal. The demonstration project reveals how ingroups and outgroups can come to see themselves as having what Samuel Gaertner calls a “superordinate identity,” an overarching or umbrella identity. This occurs through recategorization and deategorization. Recategorization happens when members of two groups begin to see themselves as members of one larger superordinate group; it focuses on similarities and obscures the us-them divisions. Not only are the attitudes toward outgroup members positive, they are even more positive than the attitudes toward members of the original ingroup. “Upon recognition of a superordinate group connection, newly regarded ingroup members are initially accorded especially positive reactions compared to when they were regarded only as outgroup members. Also, these reactions to newcomers are even more extreme compared to the reactions accorded original ingroup members. If indeed superordinate connection motivates initially amplified positive reactions to ‘newcomers,’ this emotional reaction can perhaps be leveraged to promote more harmonious long-term relationships.”⁹⁵

Gaertner’s studies revealed that when people experience themselves as part of a common ingroup, they are able to have more personal, self-revealing conversations and interactions with former outgroup members. Gaertner and his team observed that this

⁹⁵ Samuel Gaertner, et al., “Across Cultural Divides: The Value of a Superordinate Identity,” in *Cultural Divides: Understanding and Overcoming Group Conflict*, Deborah A. Prentice and Dale T. Miller, eds., (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 194.

phenomenon operates reciprocally. Personal sharing contributes to a lessening of ingroup and outgroup boundaries and the lessening of boundaries leads to more personal disclosure. “This consequence can thereby activate an additional, independent pathway for increasing intergroup harmony. Similarly, in another experiment, we observed that the capacity of personalized, self-disclosing interactions to bring ingroup and outgroup members psychologically closer also transformed their perceptions of the aggregate from being two groups to being one group.”⁹⁶

Decategorization occurs when people are able to see each other more as individuals and less as stereotyped members of a group. When one knows more about an individual, the generalized group identity becomes less important and has less power. Thus the identity of “Muslim man” is supplemented and perhaps even replaced with identities of father, professional, person who is caring for elderly parents, fellow golf lover, person of faith, movie lover, or whatever the particular identities might be. Gaertner writes, “When interactions are personalized, ingroup and outgroup members move toward the individual end of the individual-group social identity continuum. Repeated personalized interactions with a variety of outgroup members should over time undermine the value of the individual’s category stereotype as a source of information about members of that group.”⁹⁷

Researchers have found there are factors that intensify ingroup and outgroup dynamics; among them are the media and emotion, and they often go hand in hand. It

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 180-181.

must be said that the intense fear and anxiety of the 9/11 event have influenced Muslim-Christian relations in America; it may be impossible to overstate the impact. Marilyn Brewer, a psychologist and researcher at The Ohio State University, says the role of emotion cannot be ignored for ingroup and outgroup identities. The 9/11 bombings triggered an extreme emotional response in Americans and people around the world. The feelings of terror, grief, contempt, anger and even hatred became attached to followers of Islam. In a highly aroused emotional environment, “...intergroup anxiety is transformed into more virulent intergroup emotions of fear, hatred or disgust. It is this emotional component here to be the critical ingredient that turns intergroup comparison into intergroup antagonism.”⁹⁸

Brewer uses the words “emotions” and “feelings” interchangeably. However, the pioneer of family systems theory, Murray Bowen, makes a distinction between the two that illuminates this discussion. Bowen writes: “In the literature there are discrepant views about the definition of and the relatedness between *emotion* and *feelings*. (Emphasis original.) Operationally I regard an emotional system as something deep that is in contact with cellular and somatic processes, and a feeling system as a bridge that is in contact with parts of the emotional system on one side and with the intellectual system on the other side.”⁹⁹ In other words, grief, sadness, and joy are feelings that touch deep parts of our humanity, while anger and fear are emotions driven by anxiety of the moment or circumstance. Bowen would likely say that the 9/11 attacks prompted reactive

⁹⁸ Brewer, 32.

⁹⁹ Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 158-159.

emotions of anger and anxiety, which prevent people from thinking clearly about stereotypes and Muslims as a group.

In the United States, those emotions are frequently provoked by media outlets seeking to boost viewership, with Muslims being a prime target for inflammatory coverage. Certainly for the majority of the congregation of First Community Church, the only exposure members have to Muslims is what they see and read, and what they see and read about most frequently is extremists and terrorists. As early as 1958, Mazafer Sherif wrote, “Of course, in large group units the picture of the outgroup and relations with it depend very heavily on communication, particularly from the mass media.”¹⁰⁰ At the time Mazafer was doing his research, there was no Internet, no cable news or 24-hour news cycle, no Twitter, Facebook or YouTube. The impact of the media has increased exponentially since then. The stereotype of “violent Islam” heightens to an extreme the “uniformity force” that operates in groups. The uniformity force works this way: “When individuals take on a group-based identity, there is *uniformity* [emphasis original] of perception among group members. Group members see things in the same way. They act in concert, identifying and evaluating themselves and others in the group positively and identifying and negatively evaluating others not in the group. From this develops a sense of ‘we’ and ‘us’ (toward the ingroup) and ‘them’ toward the outgroup.”¹⁰¹

The media contribute to creating what Burke and Stets call the “prototype” for a group; that is, “the set of features that distinguishes ingroup members from outgroup

¹⁰⁰ Muzafer Sherif, “Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict,” *American Journal of Sociology* (January 1958): 351.

¹⁰¹ Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 119.

members. Prototypicality represents the degree to which a group member exemplifies or is representative of the stereotypical attributes of the group as a whole by being most like ingroup members and simultaneously most different from outgroup members.”¹⁰² By introducing church members to neighboring Muslims, and creating an environment for them to “rub elbows,” my goal was to demonstrate to Christians that terrorists are not the prototype for people of Islamic faith, in spite of the caricature they see in the media. I wanted them to see the prototypical Muslim (to the degree such a person exists) as a person more like them, with common values and priorities in life.¹⁰³

Theological Perspective: A New Creation

Among Christians and Muslims, the superordinate identity is one of people who share a belief in one God and who hold dear a set of common values. The superordinate identity is like glue; it is able to join in one group people who are otherwise categorized as in-out, same-other, or us-them. In the experience of Muslim-Christian bridge building, people of both faiths have the potential to become a “new creation” by seeing themselves and each other as members of the same group, a group that holds belief and trust in God to be central and a group that prioritizes compassion, justice, and care for humanity and all the created world.

When the shared belief in God becomes central, Christians and Muslims are able to more readily see in each other the *Imago Dei*, image of God. From this perspective

¹⁰² Ibid., 118.

¹⁰³ Along the way, some humorous similarities emerged. As we were planning the first bridge building experience one of the organizers from the mosque said, a bit sheepishly, that with children playing sports it can be difficult to gather a group on a Saturday morning. Not surprisingly, I faced the same challenge at First Community Church. As important as interfaith dialogue may be, even it is sometimes trumped by youth soccer.

Muslims and Christians are (metaphorically) able to stand shoulder to shoulder looking outward with a shared view of creation. The alternative is standing face to face, seeing only the challenge of the “other.” Particularly in an increasingly secular North America, the shared conviction that God is important is a powerful agent for peace and justice. In the language of Christianity, it is a powerful tool to bring about the superordinate goal, the kingdom of God on Earth.(The meaning of the Greek βασιλεα, kingdom, that I intend here is the reign or rule of God, as opposed to a physical location.) Through the power of a superordinate identity and goal, the seed is sown for transformation and, in the language of the Second Testament, all things can be made new.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH QUESTION: CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM PARTNERSHIPS

This chapter will examine three Christian-Muslim partnerships in the Midwestern United States that demonstrate how the bonds of faith and friendship can grow. In Memphis, Tennessee, the need for prayer space during Ramadan prompted an ongoing relationship between a Christian church and the local Muslim community. In a suburb of Chicago, a similar shared-space arrangement exists; it is unusual because it has been in place since 1987. Also in Chicago, a Greek Orthodox bishop is leading the effort to heal longstanding wounds between his community and followers of Islam.

Sharing Space in Memphis

In Memphis, Steve Stone pastors the Heartsong Church. When he first heard that a group of Muslims was buying property next door to the church, he admits feeling uneasy. Mosque-building projects near ground zero in Manhattan and elsewhere had set off angry protests and Stone dreaded the possibility of the same thing happening in the neighborhood of his church. Stone's response was to erect a six-foot sign saying, "Heartsong Church Welcomes Memphis Islamic Center to the Neighborhood." It was a welcome surprise to members of the Muslim community. Danish Siddiqui, a member of the Muslim Islamic Center (MIC) board remembers, "Obviously we were taken aback, but in a very positive way. Muslims, we tend to think of ourselves as good neighbors, but

Steve beat us to the punch and put up that sign – and all we had to do was knock on the door and introduce ourselves.”¹⁰⁴

While the MIC was under construction in 2010, the Muslim congregation needed a space for prayers during the holy month of Ramadan. Siddiqui said they tried to find rental space but nothing was available, so they asked Stone if they could use a gathering space inside Heartsong Church. Stone not only said yes, but also insisted they use the main worship space. Stone recalls, “We were so honored to be asked because we knew that if they ever had any thought that we would say no, they would not have asked us.”¹⁰⁵ For Pastor Stone, the theological reasoning was simple: Jesus would welcome the new neighbors and Jesus presents the model for Christians. In an editorial column written for *Christianity Today*, Stone said the decision to share space with Muslim neighbors was a “nobrainer”:

They asked. So what do we do; how do we respond; on what basis? Our response has to be grounded in our love for Jesus and our commitment to follow only him. The first thing that came to me was the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus intentionally chose as the hero of that story one whom his hearers would most ‘naturally’ have feared and hated. He says that the one they despised out of hand is the very one who was the neighbor – the very one who fulfilled the second commandment. And then he told all who would hear to go and be that kind of neighbor. We heard.¹⁰⁶

Not everyone shared Stone’s perspective that helping members of the MIC was a “nobrainer.” He received criticism from some colleagues in the evangelical community

¹⁰⁴ Laura Sullivan, “A Ramadan Story of Two Faiths Bound in Friendship,” *National Public Radio*, 21 August 2011, www.npr.com (accessed December 19, 2013).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Steven Stone, “Why We Opened Our Church to Muslims: A Response to ‘Muslims in Evangelical Churches,’” *Christianity Today*, 27 January 2011, www.christianitytoday.com (accessed December 19, 2013).

and about 20 out of 550 congregants left the church. In the end, Stone says, their leaving was for the best. “At the end of the day, if they really believed what they said they believed, we’re kind of glad they left, because we didn’t want them going out into the community and saying, ‘We have these hateful feelings and we go to Heartsong Church.’”¹⁰⁷

After the initial welcome, the relationship between the MIC and Heartsong Church blossomed. Members of the Muslim community have prepared breakfast on Sunday mornings for Heartsong worshippers. The two congregations work together once a month to serve the homeless. Heartsong hosts a Thanksgiving dinner at the church for Muslims and Christians to share together. Their most ambitious joint project is the construction of Friendship Park, a community park to be built on land belonging to both the MIC and the church. In the design phase in 2013, the park will be a place for play, meditation and education about other cultures. And it all started with a word of welcome from Pastor Steven Stone, “It’s a simple thing we have done, but God has used it in a big way. We were just being nice to each other.”¹⁰⁸

Sharing Space in Chicago

It was also a need for prayer space that brought together Muslims and Christians in Chicago more than 30 years ago. For the Batavia Islamic Center (BIC), however, the arrangement is not temporary. Since 1987 the BIC has been meeting in the basement of the Calvary Episcopal Church. The unusual partnership is profiled in Paul Numrich’s

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ David Waters, “Faith Matters: Church, mosque plan to build park together,” *The Commercial Appeal*, 28 July 2012, www.commercialappeal.com (accessed December 19, 2013).

work on interfaith life in America, *The Faith Next Door: American Christians and Their New Religious Neighbors*. Mazher Ahmed cofounded the BIC with her husband: “Interfaith is a buzzword now. But at that time [the 1980s], who knew about interfaith? I don’t think people even understood what interfaith was all about. That is why I feel real proud that we have started a tradition and not because of the necessity of 9/11.”¹⁰⁹

Mazher and her husband, Hamid, immigrated from India in the 70s. At the time, there was no mosque offering prayer services on Friday evenings, so they held evening prayer in their own home. Mazher made the prayer rugs herself. Eventually the need arose for a larger space; Paul Numrich narrates what happened next:

Hamid inquired among his coworkers in the county government offices about vacant schools the Muslims could rent. Word spread to the county superintendent of schools, Jim Hansen, who called Hamid into his office. Hamid thought Jim wanted him to redraw a school district’s boundaries as part of his job in the county mapping department. However, as Hamid and Mazher tell it today, Jim said, “I have in mind a place you can use, but I would like you to see it first. It’s a church. Do you think it will be okay if you pray in a church?”¹¹⁰

When Hamid said “yes,” a relationship of respect and fellowship was born. For Mazher Ahmed, that relationship comes from a lifelong passion for interfaith connection. She is particularly proud that when a person walks into the classroom that the mosque shares with Calvary Episcopal, artwork by Christian children hangs side-by-side with the crayon drawings of the Islamic children. It is colorful symbol of the relationship

¹⁰⁹ Paul D. Numrich, *The Faith Next Door: American Christians and Their New Religious Neighbors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

of faith and friendship that has developed between the Christian and Muslim congregations.¹¹¹

Developing interfaith initiatives was not something Mazher Ahmed set out to do. An architect, her professional work is in geographical data mapping. A warm, engaging woman, she says with a laugh, “Believe me I had no clue that God was putting me on this path.”¹¹² She says her faith teaches her to have good relationships with all human beings and her family showed her how to do it: “My family, my elders, parents, grandparents, they inculcated these things in me by their actions, not their talk. Talk is cheap. They cared for their neighbors. That is what we are on earth to do.”

The rector of Calvary Episcopal Church, Father Mike Rasicci, believes most people in the neighborhood are not even aware that there is an Islamic Center operating in the basement. Rasicci says it is not an indication that Episcopalian are “wimpy-washy” about their faith because they are willing to share space with the Muslim group; he believes, “they are representing Christ’s love in their openness, rather than reacting in anger which he feels there is too much of in the world.”¹¹³

Ahmed says the sharing of space at Calvary Episcopal Church has led to connections and friendship. When the church has an ice cream social or other event, the Muslim community joins in. At Ramadan, when the Batavia Cultural Center hosts an Iftar dinner to break the fast at sunset, Christians from the church are invited to the feast. When the Islamic group holds a lecture series on the Prophet Muhammad, church

¹¹¹ <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org> (accessed December 22, 2013).

¹¹² Mazher Ahmed, interview by the author, Columbus, December 23, 2013.

¹¹³ Ibid.

members share in the organizing. Ahmed believes wholeheartedly in connection.

“Connecting with people of other faiths is my passion. When you are connected you can avoid misconception and then you are not afraid of the unknown.”

Does she ever get tired of defending Islam – of defending her faith? “I never get tired; tired is not the word. It rejuvenates me to talk about my faith and oh my goodness there is so much more to do!” In an article in a community newspaper in 2012, Mazher said there will always be people who criticize Islam because they don’t understand it, but she refuses to dwell on that:

There are things that people say and do, but we also have very good friends in this country. We are a part of this community. This is our home and where our heart is. As a human being, you have to live together, regardless of being a Christian or a Muslim, you are a human being first because He made you.¹¹⁴

Sharing the Past

For much of the Greek Orthodox community, any conversation about Muslim-Christian relations begins with one date: May 29, 1453. On that day the city of Constantinople fell to Ottoman invaders, marking the end of the Roman Empire. Even today, there are those in the Orthodox church who are offended when the Turkish city that was once Constantinople is called by its current name, Istanbul. This is the environment in which Demetri Kantzavelos, or Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, finds himself as he works to build bridges between Muslims and Christians in Chicago.

¹¹⁴ Frank Vaisvilas, “Muslims, Christians sharing worship space in Batavia hope to set example,” [www.mysuburbanlife.com](http://www.mysuburbanlife.com/2012/11/01/muslims-christians-sharing-worship-space-in-batavia-hope-to-set-example/a5s2xdz/), 1 November 2012, <http://www.mysuburbanlife.com/2012/11/01/muslims-christians-sharing-worship-space-in-batavia-hope-to-set-example/a5s2xdz/>

Chicago has the third largest Greek Orthodox community in the world and Bishop Demetrios is their spiritual leader. Named as “One of Twelve People to Watch” in 2003 by the Chicago Sun Times,¹¹⁵ Demetrios has distinguished himself as a leading voice in interfaith dialogue, particularly Greek Orthodox/Muslim dialogue. For his efforts, the Niagra Foundation, a Turkish-Muslim organization, honored him with the Fethullah Gulen Award.¹¹⁶

When asked what drew him to Muslim-Christian bridge building, Demetrios chuckles and tells the story: “It began with an exchange of letters-to-the-editor of the *Chicago Tribune* about an ABC News broadcast from Turkey. At the time, the United States was seeking military bases in Turkey for action against Iraq. Diane Sawyer and “Good Morning America” did reports on the history of Turkey, but they completely ignored anything that happened before the fall of Constantinople. It was as if an entire pre-Ottoman civilization and its many accomplishments never existed.”¹¹⁷

A Turkish business leader named Mehmet Celebi responded to Demetrios’ comments in the *Chicago Tribune* with his own column on behalf of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations. It was a harsh exchange. In his letter Celebri wrote:

Turkey has passed many encouraging and brave reforms that address many of her shortcomings. When Kantzavelos mentioned some of these shortcomings, he must have forgotten Greece's abuse and mistreatment of its Turkish and other minorities. These have been documented and reported by many human rights organizations.

¹¹⁵ Cathleen Falsani, “A standout at 40, this is a cleric who's on way up,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 5 January 2003.

¹¹⁶ The Gulen award is named for a Turkish Muslim cleric who lives in the United States and is a respected global interfaith leader.

¹¹⁷ Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, interview by the author, Columbus, December 5, 2013.

It is the Greek Orthodox Church's meddling with politics that has caused major rifts between Greece and its neighbors. With all due respect, I urge Kanzavelos to stick to the teaching of religion and tolerance and discourage hatred and division.¹¹⁸

Several months later, the two men met and Demetrios says Celebri apologized: “To make a long story short, we began by strongly disagreeing and now we are the best of friends; we are closer than brothers.” The two men decided to engage in bridge building together with their communities. Demetrios acknowledges dialogue is not an “easy sell” in the Greek Orthodox world. “Don’t forget [the Muslim] community has the history of being the conquerors. It’s not a culture of hate exactly, but Greek people will say, ‘Here’s what they did to us. There was a lot of blood and sacrifice.’ All the problems we faced as a community are not easily forgotten.” Maybe not forgotten, but forgiven. Demetrios says, “It is important to look to the future rather than the past. We have to move on and live together. Move beyond tolerance, to acceptance, understanding and respect.” Speaking to a Turkish Muslim group to 2013, Demetrios reflected on the need to heal past wounds:

[For me to be] addressing members of the Turkish-American community, and even receiving an award from one such organization, would have shocked my Greek grandparents, and is still suspect in some quarters of our Greek and Turkish communities. The Greek and Turkish peoples each have a great and noble history, histories that have in the past, at times, intersected painfully, but which remain ripe with possibilities for the present and future.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Mehmet Celebri, “Greek History,” *Chicago Tribune*, 8 March 2003.

¹¹⁹ Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, “Celebrating Diversity: Finding Ways For Peaceful Coexistence,” address to Turkish Cultural Center of New Hampshire Friendship Dinner, Manchester, October 15, 2013.

Bishop Demetrios points to two strategies that he believes have been particularly effective in Chicago. First he says, the Muslim and Orthodox Christians come together around non-religious activities and issues. One such event focused on the architects of Istanbul and the shared pride of both communities in the architectural accomplishments of their region. Another event was the showing of “Hello Anatolia,” a movie about a young Turkish man discovering his roots, roots shared by Muslims and Orthodox Christians as well. The communities worked together to send aid to Turkey after a devastating earthquake in 2011.

Demetrios is also an advocate of travel as a method of bridge building. At the initiative of the Niagra Foundation, Christian and Muslims have travelled together to Turkey and seen the country’s treasures through each other’s eyes. Demetrios says it is an extraordinary experience to walk through the Hagia Sophia with a member of another faith. Once a church, then a mosque, and now a museum, it is a living monument for Muslims and Christians alike.

When asked what makes for successful interfaith effort, Bishop Demetrios offers these suggestions:

1. Individuals must be allowed to speak authentically and honestly. Painful parts of our history must be acknowledged. We learned in Chicago is that we [Muslims and Christians] were suffering together.
2. Visit each other; get to know each other face to face.
3. Find points of commonality; let people see where and how the other lives his or her everyday life.

4. Always be respectful to the other and acknowledge in a deep way the personhood of the other.
5. Honor the history, however painful it is. Make sure you talk about the pain and what we do about the pain and then move forward. What is most important is shaping a positive future together.

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT AND EVALUATION

The demonstration project had three phases: building awareness of the challenge, pulling together a team, and designing and implementing an intervention for the congregation to address the challenge. It began with a building awareness phase to tell the congregation about the project and to begin educating the congregation about Islam. The education-awareness phase began in December 2012 with the first of three monthly columns in the church newsletter and continued with two sermons in January and February 2013. The final step in this phase was a 90-minute introduction to Islam called Islam 101. Each was evaluated by a questionnaire.

The project used a qualitative approach to evaluation. The larger-scale project elements that made up the building awareness stage were evaluated using a questionnaire with multiple choice, continuous scale, and open-ended questions. The intervention stage of the demonstration project (the bridge building experience) was evaluated using triangulated data, with questionnaires, observer field notes, and followup interviews, with the intent to observe emerging patterns and themes. A complete discussion of evaluation of the bridge building experience comes later in this chapter. While we know the circulation of the church newsletter (*firstnews*) is 3,500 per month, we cannot quantify who reads what. Responding to the questionnaire required the reader to take an additional

step, to go to the church website and answer the questions online. There were 149 responses about the first column, “Did you know?” Of the respondents, 94% agreed or strongly agreed that they learned more about the Islamic faith by reading the column and 90% agreed or strongly agreed they have a better understanding of the need to build relationships between Muslims and Christians. One person wrote, “After reading this article, I have to admit I know little to nothing about the Muslim faith. Unfortunately I don’t think I’m alone in that, and it seems that our MISunderstandings [sic]are a problem, not our understandings!” In the column, I used the opportunity presented by the upcoming Christmas holiday to talk about the reverence Muslims have for Jesus and Mary as “just one example of the common ground between Christians and Muslims.” One reader picked up on the connection, “This article takes a central story of Christian faith and shows a direct tie-in to Islamic beliefs that I believe many would find surprising. Nice little nugget of information for those who may not want to ‘study’ Islam.”

The second column, “Bar None in 2013?” elicited 104 responses. Of these respondents, 86% said they learned more about the Islamic faith and 91% said they have a better understanding of the need for relationship building between Muslims and Christians. One respondent said, “If we are to survive, we need to get along with other believers and show them love and understanding.” Another reader shared how she is able to put her new knowledge into practice, “A lot of my new neighbors are Muslim and I find [Rev. Lindsay’s] writing and preaching very helpful to be a good neighbor.” In conversations I had with church members, many shared the concern of another female

reader, “I am concerned about the lack of respect for women in this religion. Can you do an article discussing this?”

The February column did focus on women in Islam; however, the response rate of 36 people was disappointing. I can only speculate about why the responses dropped so dramatically. It was surprising to me because I was asked so many questions about Muslim women and the oppression of women is one of the more common stereotypes about Islam. It could be there was declining energy for the project. Nearly all the respondents, 96%, said they had read a previous column or heard one of my sermons about Islam, indicating this was a group with an interest in the topic. It’s also possible the response rate was down because I was out of town for several Sundays in February and unable to make a personal plea in worship for participation. A third possibility is that the request for comments was presented differently in February. In the December and January newsletters, the request for readers to respond to a questionnaire came directly from me and it was personal, “Please help with my research....” In the February *firstnews*, the request for response was expressed in the third person: “Please help with Rev. Lindsay’s Doctor of Ministry research by answering a very brief questionnaire about this column.” It may be that the personal request from me elicited more responses. It is also possible that with the third-person language, readers were not sure if I would read the responses. Of those who did respond, 84% said the column contributed to their understanding of Islam and 76% said they understand the need for bridge building between the two faiths, however with such a low response rate these percentages do not carry much weight.

The two sermons prepared for the project fell on Epiphany and the first Sunday in Lent. As a preacher, I felt this was fortunate because the liturgical themes of the day were well known to the congregation and so provided a welcome opportunity to speak about what Christianity shares with Islam. For Epiphany, I spoke about “holy otherness” and what it means to be a stranger. I reminded listeners that the magi came from what we now know as Iraq and Iran and they were true foreigners and strangers to a peasant class couple like Mary and Joseph. “Welcome the Stranger” was preached in three worship services at two locations. A total of 687 adults attended; 215 responded to the sermon feedback form. Most respondents used the paper forms included in the bulletin and dropped them in special boxes at the exits. The questionnaire was also available online and it could be accessed by a QRC (Quick Response Code) in the bulletin.

The multifaith perspective on the gospel story caught the attention of a number of parishioners, “I was very moved to learn that the seeds of all three Abrahamic faiths were present together in Bethlehem.” A number of respondents said the notion of interfaith bridge building reflects the theology of inclusion they have learned at First Community Church. This was a point of pride in the comments, “Right on the mark affirmation of FCC's quest to teach and guide us to be humble and accepting of others.”

While most of the comments were favorable, one reflected a continuing theme throughout the demonstration project. As I sought to focus on the commonalities between Islam and Christianity, some parishioners wanted a focus on—or an explanation of—the extremists: “The problem of course is the huge number of radical Islamists that have no concern for the life of others, do not respect human life and do not love their neighbors.

How do we teach them?” Another wrote, “Why do Muslims want to kill most westerners?” As will be seen later, responses to Islam 101 also indicated a desire among Christians to understand the fanatical edge of Islam.

According to the responses, “Welcome the Stranger” met and exceeded the project goals. Among the respondents, 87% agreed or strongly agreed they learned more about the Islamic faith and 96% agreed or strongly agreed they have a better understanding of the need for bridge building between Christians and Muslims.

The second sermon, “One God, One Lord,” was preached at two special music services on the first Sunday in Lent, February 17, 2013. In this sermon, I was deliberately provocative in comparing jihad to the Christian tradition of giving something up for Lent. In actuality, the two spiritual practices hold much in common. The services were attended by 578 people (most, but not all, adults). Respondents turned in 255 questionnaires. As in the previous sermon, most responses came in paper questionnaires handed in at the end of the service and some responded on the Internet. One person said the sermon was “very appropriate for the first Sunday in Lent,” while another said it was, “odd to incorporate Islam into a sermon during Christian high holy time.”

Regarding a better understanding of Islam and the need for relationship building, the results for both sermons were strikingly similar. After “One God, One Lord,” 95% agreed or strongly agreed they have a better understanding of Islam and 79% agreed or strongly agreed they have a better understanding the need for relationship building, also well exceeding project goals. (The goal was that 35% of respondents at FCC have grown in their understanding of Islam and the need for Christian-Muslim bridge building.)

The final piece of the building awareness stage was an educational event called Islam 101, held at FCC on a Sunday afternoon. Islam 101 was taught by a convert to Islam, Jeri Milburn, who was a member of the NICC outreach team. Jeri is the single mother of a teenage daughter who lives in the neighborhood where one of the church campuses is located. (Many participants commented after the event, “She’s just like us.”) Jeri’s teaching about the essentials of Islam was clear, straightforward and humorous. She shared a powerful personal story of conversion to Islam and addressed questions about terrorism and the rights of women with candor. Her presence and demeanor alone went a long way to diminish stereotypes about Muslims.

Islam 101 benefitted enormously from a push by middle school and high school leaders to have the younger people attend. Of the 181 people who attended, 38 (20%) were under age 24.¹²⁰ One teenage boy reported after the seminar that his opinion of Islam had changed, “I thought Islam was bad but now I know that it is good and peaceful.” Another participant echoed a common view, “I didn’t know they were so accepting of Christians.” Other responses were, “Muslims are more like us than I thought and thus more approachable. I had thought Muslims wanted to be separate from non-Muslims,” and “I loved learning that it is a peaceful, passive religion; great context brought less fear. [It] sounds like a beautiful religion.” A college-age participant went away with a new respect for Muslims’ adherence to their faith, “I have a great respect for Muslims and their devotion to God’s charity (I could never pray or fast like that).”

When asked what was most surprising about what was learned in Islam 101,

¹²⁰ 20% is a significantly higher percentage of young people than responded to questionnaires about the sermons or newsletter columns. Among those respondents less than 5% were under 24.

several patterns emerged. Participants were most surprised about the importance of Jesus and the Bible in Islam, the presence of well-known Bible stories and themes in the Qur'an, and the extent to which Christianity and Islam share common values. The shared values were also what people wanted to learn more about, as well as how to better connect our communities.

Participants were asked, "Thinking about Christian-Muslim relations, what do you most want to learn more about?" (A complete list of responses can be found in Appendix D.) The variety of responses is striking and points to a need for further education:

- Qur'an
- What a Friday prayer service is like
- Fasting
- Similarities between the two
- Story of Jesus through the eyes of Islam; definition of miracle and Jesus' birth and death
- Struggle–jihad and how religion provides strategy, prayers, and support to resolve and overcome the struggle within self and with others
- To understand how the need to work your way into heaven affects feelings about relationship with God
- The variety of forms Islam takes, Quran, fundamental beliefs versus cultural requirements

- Better understanding of faith and practices, ways to establish common ground, more tolerance and respect of differences (experience ourselves as more similar than different)
- Why do genders pray separately? What are ablutions rooms? Why do you wash your feet? In praying to Mecca, how do you find it when you are in an unfamiliar place?
- Differences in Muslim faith based on different countries, e.g. Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Muslims seem to have a high level of judgment within their religion; does this lead to judgment of non-Muslims?
- How can we sit in "a circle" and talk?
- How can we make our country less afraid of Muslims? Media, churches, and particularly fundamentalist churches promote this fear of "the other."
- Radicals and wanting to kill non-Muslims
- Paths of common potential action towards mutually acceptable goals
- So much was covered that I feel I understand the basics of Islam and its shared beliefs.
- Is there variation of belief among Muslims re: referring to God as a "He" and literal ideas of heaven and hell after life?
- If Muslims believe in nondiscrimination, why don't they recognize gays?

- Recognizing that Islam supports peace, how do militant Muslims justify their actions and beliefs?
- How do we have Christian-Muslim events that attract enough media attention to make it a headline?
- Why is there such a strong division between violent Muslims and others?
- Why is there so much tension between Muslims and other religions? Why aren't more moderate Muslims rallying together and publicly condemning the extremists who are killing in the name of Islam? Are the moderates making efforts to reach out to the poorest and least educated Muslims who are most vulnerable to extremist views?
- I would like to learn as much as possible!
- What do Muslims think of Christian beliefs and how do they think we could be better people?
- life in the US as a Muslim among Christians today
- 5 daily prayers; group prayer versus individual
- There is a lot of "control" in Islam. Why the number of prayers? What if women won't dress as they are told to?
- Culture, food, dances, daily life
- How to figure out the answer to poor, illiterate people being taken advantage of in the name of Islam?
- I am still unconvinced about female equality.

- Specific strategies on how to improve Muslim-Christian relations
- Ways to come together and build relationships; how to find common ground and establish similarities and celebrate differences
- Genital mutilation and the reasons for it
- The seeming inconsistency between God's will and free will/accountability
- Sufism, intersections of belief, women's rights within Islam and the idea of equality
- The Quran is more tied into Judeo-Christian than I thought.
- How much different it is from what we hear on TV.
- More day to day practices; how not to offend
- Why more cannot be done to condemn the "loose cannons" interpreting the Quran
- This was fantastic and I would like to see it repeated.
- Sharia law – origins, specific info that would help us better understand what leads to the conflict, hatred, and injustices round the world
- The large similarity between Christians and Muslims; I knew there were some but not so many.
- Trip to Mecca. We need to have more opportunities to meet other Muslims. How about a potluck?
- Problem (for me) is NOT Christian-Muslim but difference between “answer church” (as Islam was presented) and “journey church” (FCC)

- Does each mosque have a leader? How did that person prepare to lead?

Can women lead in Islamic congregations? Is there a connection

between American Muslims and Muslims in Iran and Syria? Do they

have something like our denominational connections?

Once the awareness building phase was complete, the next step was to create a setting for members of FCC to “rub elbows” with their Muslim neighbors. The intervention called for designing an activity for Christians and Muslims that allowed for working together in a lighthearted atmosphere to achieve a common goal, followed by a period of small-group dialogue. A member of my site team, a retired United Church of Christ minister, devoted much of his career to designing and conducting community-building activities and he designed the activity for the demonstration project.

Before being conducted on a wider scale, the activity was tested by the site team and three members of the NICC outreach team. We were particularly concerned that the activity would not violate cultural boundaries (such as physical contact between men and women) and so a test with members of the Muslim community was critical. After the test, our Muslim colleagues confirmed the activity was appropriate, fun and a fresh new way to initiate Muslim Christian relationships. In the pilot group, it was agreed that shared laughter is an effective tool for bridge building.

Lois Zook, a member of the site team, offered this evaluation of the test activity: “Deborah had a great vision for this project and was able to engage a team of individuals with the right combination of strengths to develop the experience. The knowledge and information that she already had about the Noor Islamic Cultural Center and her key

relationship with members of that community made it very comfortable to involve them in the project.

It was very evident early on that the energy and comfort level of the First Community site team and the Noor team partners were good indicators that the demonstration project would be successful. Our joint meeting to demonstrate the project confirmed Deborah's vision and team building expectations to all of us. The criteria for the skills needed to experience the common values of both groups were easily identified."

Site team member Laura Adkins reflected on the coming together of teams from the church and the mosque: "Deb invited Jeri Milburn, from NICC, to speak to the site team. This really set a comfortable tone for providing background knowledge and open Christian-Muslim communication. When we hosted the first event at FCC, Deb conveyed a genuine gratitude for having our faiths come together and both the FCC and NICC participants seemed to enjoy the activity and the interfaith dialogue that followed. I felt like I really got a chance to interact and learn with members of the Muslim faith."

The bridge building activity was held twice, on a Saturday morning and a Sunday evening, at the Noor Islamic Cultural Center. Very few of the Christians had ever been to a mosque or observed Muslims at prayer, so the location itself presented a learning opportunity. One participant from FCC said observing prayer was, for her, the most interesting part of the event. Additionally, the warm welcome and hospitality shown by the Muslim hosts contributed to Christians feeling at ease. Participants were selected in several ways: many had attended Islam 101 and indicated a desire on the questionnaire to be included in a "bridge building experience," some had asked me directly if they could

be included, and some I recruited to accomplish a balance of age and gender. For the first event, we had one entire small-group made up of teenagers; the second event had a mixed group of teenagers and young adults. On the Muslim side, most of the participants were members of, or connected to, the NICC's outreach team and some of them brought their teenage children.

We began the event sitting in a large circle for introductions and a brief explanation of the project. At the outset, there was little mixing between Christians and Muslims. It is not as if people were looking warily across the room at each other; the division was more a function of people sitting next to people they already knew. I observed people to be a bit formal and overly polite with each other; no one knew quite what to expect.

The activity was loosely constructed around the metaphor of bridge building. The most important step in building an actual, physical bridge is determining where to locate the foundations. Without firm foundations the bridge will not be stable. With that in mind, we asked participants (who were divided into groups of six with three Muslims and three Christians) to think about the “foundations” of their faith. Without any discussion, they were instructed to pick one value they believe is most or very important in life and write it on a small Post-it note. These values would form the foundation of the bridge being built that day between Muslims and Christians.

After identifying the foundational values, the group's assignment was to transport them (the “construction materials”) to a drop zone (the “construction site”). This is where the fun started. Each group had a selection of supplies: tape, paper and binder clips,

string, Post-it notes, markers and six helium-filled balloons. Their mission was to build a basket to carry the Post-it notes; the basket would be flown across the room supported by the balloons. If the basket was too heavy or too light, it could not fly. Participants were not allowed to touch the balloons or the baskets in flight; they had to be moved forward by waving file folders at the balloons to create a breeze. Their written instructions included the pattern for a “release mechanism” that would allow the values to be dropped into the drop zone.

The purpose of the activity was to get people working side by side on a lighthearted, low stakes task that would build a sense of camaraderie and teamwork. Silliness and laughter were intended. In other settings and for other purposes, such an activity would be called an “icebreaker.” In this context, for Christians who had never met or had much contact with their Muslim neighbors, the activity was much more; it was an opportunity to see beyond stereotypes and experience people of Islamic faith as human beings who can laugh and connect. For Muslims, the activity connected them with Christians who wanted to connect and learn more. The “formal and overly polite” atmosphere quickly evaporated.

The bridge-building activity was designed to generate fun, collaborative engagement that required no special ability or expertise and that did not initially involve direct dialogue. Instead it generated what Edith Howe and S. Mark Heim call “dialogue with one degree of separation.”¹²¹ They advocate for “unprogrammed learning [that occurs when] religious people speak together about a subject that is not, in full-frontal

¹²¹ Edith Howe and S. Mark Heim, “The Next Thing to Dialogue,” in *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*, ed. Rebecca Kratz Mays, 47-60 (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 2008), 48.

terms, ‘my religion.’” Multifaith dialogue is often best accomplished through an indirect approach:

There are things that can only be seen if you are not directly looking at them. Friendship generally arises among those enjoying time together intently occupied otherwise, than in planning how to get to know each other. The young sports fan learns math in the process of figuring batting averages. So it is with interreligious dialogue. To sit people down opposite each other and ask them to represent their religions is rather like sitting the same people opposite each other and asking them to “represent” their families. An afternoon spent in the midst of family, while you all climbed a mountain or went to the circus, would probably teach you more.¹²²

An unintended consequence of the activity happened when the first group successfully made its delivery to the drop zone. Although it was not a race, a competitive atmosphere immediately developed in the room. Whatever the Christian-Muslim dynamic was at the start, it became each building group versus the others. In this group of upper middle-class, professional people the competitive urge was nearly universal. One young adult reported her group decided to “spy” on the others, “We were getting a little frustrated and couldn’t seem to get it going. When we were stumped, we agreed to look around to see what the other groups were doing that was working; we all spread out and actually kind of spied on the other groups. So we became more of a team after that.”

Another church member said, “We reassigned ourselves to a different us.” (Which is exactly the process of recategorization, described in social identity theory.)

As each small group made it to the drop zone there was high-fiving, laughter and cheering all around. The atmosphere in the room shifted to good-natured cooperation and celebration, and this became the context for the small group dialogue that was to come. It

¹²² Ibid., 47.

bears mentioning here that there was as much laughter and goodwill when the vessels did not fly as there was when they finally did. An observer taking field notes wrote, “All were invested in success. All laughed at setbacks.”

When asked how they would describe the activity to people who were not there, the teenagers reported, “It was really fun.” “It shows that we’re not that different.” “It helped not be talking about religion, because it was about something else.” “We all got along instantly anyway. In school we do stuff like this all the time.”

After all the groups completed the assignment, the Post-it notes with values written on them were distributed. Each group got a different group’s values and they were asked to determine which were Christian and which were Muslim. The values identified were compassion, love, honesty, truthfulness, acceptance, cooperation, philanthropy, open-mindedness, kindness, forgiveness, peace, family, generosity, respect and the Golden Rule. Making the distinction between Muslim and Christian values proved to be nearly impossible. (Two exceptions were modesty and submission, categorized as Islamic by members of both groups.) One group decided to create a third category called “both” and moved all their values into it.

A Muslim group member observed, “The only way you can tell the difference is by the handwriting.” Another participant complained that this portion of the exercise was deliberately designed to fail. That was not the case at all; it was added (almost as an afterthought) to make the bridge building metaphor work. The site team did not anticipate that the values portion of the activity would be such a powerful learning for the participants. In questionnaires and follow-up interviews, people said the realization of

shared values was the thing that surprised them the most. (Reflecting on the building awareness phase, and Islam 101 in particular, the most unexpected learning was the values and priorities Christians and Muslims hold in common.)

Another participant said she would be able to use her new understanding of shared values in her volunteer work with the local humane society. She often finds herself in contentious situations and she believes going forward, “If I sense they’re Muslim, I’m going to have better success in working something out because I know that we’ll have a common value system and that they are going to be respectful of my values too.”

Triangulated data were used for the bridge building event. To assess the results, three different evaluation tools were used. First, participants in the activity (both Christian and Muslim) responded to written questionnaires. Second, observers called story catchers took field notes. Third, I conducted one-on-one interviews with some of the participants. I used the term story catcher instead of observer because many Muslims in America are sensitive about being monitored, observed and scrutinized since 9/11. Story catcher was a more neutral term and better described the role in the demonstration project. To be story catchers, I recruited primarily therapists, spiritual directors and social workers for their listening skills. They were encouraged to think of themselves as anthropologists, observing behavior, actions and interactions. My instructions to them said:

It is important for you to adopt what is called in Buddhism “beginner’s mind” and set aside any preconceptions or hopes you may have about what will happen in today’s activity and conversation.

You are participating in *qualitative research*, which is interested in themes, meanings, perspectives, and understandings. Qualitative research uses words such as discover, explore, identify and describe. You will make

notes on what people say, what their body language is like, how they relate to others in the group and how all of these behaviors and responses change (or remain the same) over the course of the afternoon.

They were instructed to consider the following categories of information: general energy level, atmosphere of the group, offhand comments and asides, body language and how it changes through the event, signs of lack of interest, where participants locate themselves physically and whether this changes.

Following the bridge building activity, there was a break for refreshments. At the beginning of the session, Muslims tended to sit with Muslims and Christians with Christians; however, during the break people from the two faiths mixed widely and engaged in conversation with members of their small group. I described participants at the beginning of the event as “overly polite;” after the activity the atmosphere was much more relaxed and it was much louder in the room as people talked and laughed together. One story catcher described the group after the activity as “very cohesive, integrated around the table, exchanging personal information, much more relaxed and friendly than at the start.” As an example of connection at a personal level, a Muslim man named Ajmaal told about his eldest son going to Ohio State University in the fall, but living at home due to the connectedness of the Muslim family. Ajmaal had the whole group laughing when he said, “He would never survive on campus.” The college conversation was not an exception, but typical of the personal sharing that happened in the groups.

After the refreshment break, participants returned to their small groups for dialogue. Each group had a “guide” whose job was to keep track of the time and guide the conversation. In briefing the guides before the event, I instructed them to use a series

of questions to get things started and then allow the conversation to take its own course.

The goal was to let people ask each other questions and talk about what *they* wanted to talk about and the prompts were designed to elicit personal story and revelation. Some of the prompts were:

- Many of us have a person who really influenced our faith development, who sort of “taught” us our faith. It may be a family member or someone else. Who is that person for you?
- Has there been a time in your life when your faith really kept you going, a difficult time that you can’t imagine not surviving without a faith in God?
- What do you most want to know about the other faith? This is a time to get really honest.
- What are you passionate about in your faith?
- What do you wish people knew about your faith tradition? (So: what do Muslims wish Christians could know about them and vice versa?)

The small group dialogues developed in widely different directions. A group of teenagers talked about prayer. One Muslim girl said she had the impression Christians “only pray when they want something while Muslims do prayers as a ritual and practice.” A Christian youth named Stephen said for him, prayer is less structured. “There are certain moments, in the right setting like in nature, when I take a deep breath and take it in and really appreciate it. It’s hard to describe.” As each teenager spoke about prayer, the group was listening intently, nodding their heads and leaning in toward each other. The Christian teens were especially interested in how the Muslims managed their prayer practice at school, “Do you leave class? Do other people notice you leaving? Are you required to do it?”

Being inside a mosque was a new experience for a majority of the Christian participants; 72% had never been inside a mosque before the event. Describing how they felt before the event, 41% of the Christians said they felt very comfortable, 47% said somewhat comfortable, and 13% said they felt somewhat or very uncomfortable. After the event, 94% reported they felt very comfortable and none reported a degree of discomfort.

Regarding knowledge about Islam, 100% of Christians agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Based on my previous knowledge, this event contributed more to my understanding of Islam/Christianity.” On the subject of bridge building, 75% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “After attending this event, I have a better understanding of the need to build relationships between Christians and Muslims.” The remaining 25% said they recognized the need for bridge building before participating in the event. While the focus of this demonstration project is transformation within a particular Christian congregation, according to questionnaire responses, there was also an increase in comfort among the Muslim participants from the beginning to the end of the event.

When asked if their views or opinions about Islam had changed, Christians did not report a dramatic change, but they did experience a shift.¹²³ Following are some of their responses:

- My views have not changed but broadened. I loved learning more about how Muslims view Christianity.

¹²³ The question was: “Have your view/opinions about Islam changed? If yes, please give an example of a changed view or opinion.”

- Somewhat. I was slightly concerned about how open and accepting our Muslim hosts would be. They were great
- Came in with open mind and clear mind [with] no expectations.
- Yes, [my views have changed] It has made me realize how similar we all are.
- Christians are not as in touch with their faith as Muslims.
- Views changed [through the] team building. Value statements were common to both religions.
- No, they [my views] were not negative before.
- I am more convinced we are very much alike in our core beliefs.
- It is a process—this is a positive beginning.

At the end of the event, the group gathered again in a large circle. I closed with a prayer, after asking permission from our Muslim hosts and inviting them to say a word of blessing also. Each participant received a thank you gift, a porcelain “worry stone” with either the word *hope* or *peace*. In an interview afterward, one young adult said, “I really liked Islam 101, which I thought was so cool—learning the nitty gritty things about [their religion]. Today [the bridge building experience] was more person-to-person connection. It worked, definitely.”

The story of one participant, Steve, stood out among the comments and follow up interviews. When he arrived at the mosque, Steve sat in his car for about ten minutes before entering. He remembers, “I sat in my car and said to myself, ‘What am I doing here? I don’t know if these people even want us to be here.’ I thought these people are very different from me. If you will pardon the expression, I was girding my loins to go in

and see what was going on.” Just a few feet inside the door, he overhead a group of young men talking about soccer and the game Steve had just been watching on TV. Then he recognized a young man from a class Steve was auditing at The Ohio State University. “It was bizarre. I didn’t think I knew any Muslim people; that’s why it was bizarre. Intellectually there are a lot of Somalis and Muslims in and around campus, but I never focused on that. I didn’t avoid them, I just didn’t think their presence was out of the ordinary.”

Steve said while he enjoyed the activity, the small group discussion was not as deep as he would have liked; he said people in his group seemed to avoid talking about anything controversial. “My initial thought that day was, I really had a lot of trepidation. Later I realized I shouldn’t have felt that way. Some of that is my personality when I’m going into a situation where I don’t know all the details of what to expect. I’m glad I did it. It was a broadening experience for me, living in ‘white bread’ Upper Arlington. In the final analysis, Muslims are not all that different from me.”

Site team member Dick Meyer offered this evaluation of the bridge building activity: “The first experiment with the demonstration project was highly successful. Participants from both the FCC and NICC were highly animated and there was intensive cooperation and interaction between the two groups. The feedback discussion conducted in small groups after the activity ended produced candid observations from all group members, and was an important step in building greater understanding and relationships. There were surprisingly candid observations, even by young people, about the other group’s religion, that I had not anticipated.”

Just two days after the first event, our hopes for diminished stereotypes were put to the test. The event was on Saturday, April 13, 2013. The following Monday two attackers set off homemade bombs at the Boston Marathon. Three people were killed; one of them was an eight year old boy. Nearly 200 others were injured. There was immediate speculation in the media and on street corners about who the bombers were. Domestic or international terrorists? Was this another attack by Muslim extremists?

I conducted several interviews before the attackers (and their ethnicity) were identified. The question to recent participants (Christians) in the bridge building activity was open-ended: What were you thinking as you watched the news? One retired man said, “My first thought was, ‘My goodness all these Muslim people are going to get more bad press.’ I think it [the event at the mosque] had some influence on my reaction.” Another FCC member, who had been very hesitant to attend the mosque event said, “ My first thought? I hope it’s not an Islamic group. I thought, ‘It was Patriot Day in Boston so it was probably domestic’ and that was immediately followed by ‘I hope it isn’t Islamic.’ Those thoughts were really together. Before Saturday, I would not have thought, ‘I hope it isn’t an Islamic group.’ Before Saturday, I had never interacted with any Muslims. I think it did affect how I thought about it. They’re just like we are, at least in that setting they’re just like we are.” Another woman reacted this way, “I thought it might be a terrorist attack: ‘Oh my God I hope it’s not a Muslim group, because of my experience on Saturday I don’t want anything bad to happen to my Muslim friends.’ That was my down and dirty reaction.”

Two retired women from the church travelled to the event together because they

were anxious about visiting the mosque. They told me how they emailed each other after the Boston bombing and worried about what the reaction would be, “We wondered how that would have an impact on people at the Noor; we emailed each other. We wondered if they would feel ‘Oh no, not this again.’” Her friend recalled her feelings this way: “Saturday was so fresh in my mind. I’m taking baby steps [in getting to know Muslims]. I don’t want the rug pulled out from under me in this. I did think about the people at the Noor and wonder how they would feel. After being there, I was feeling more open and I didn’t want to lose that feeling. I thought, ‘Here we go all over again,’ but I know none of the Noor people were a part of it.”

Others I interviewed thought the attackers were domestic; some said they did not think specifically about Muslims at all and several spoke simply of sadness about the violence and loss of life. While the group of interviewees was a small one, their reflections offer anecdotal evidence that a personal encounter with the “other” (in this case Muslim people) can indeed shift one’s perspective. Returning to the research on social identity theory, whether results of a group contact experience can be generalized to the larger outgroup has not been established. Gaertner reports that while there are positive results for the people involved in the immediate contact group...

...the beneficial effects typically do not reliably generalize to the outgroup as a whole or to intergroup attitudes more generally. Nevertheless, success in promoting harmony among members of the different groups present in the contact situation is not a trivial accomplishment. In many intergroup contexts, this is precisely the major goal to be achieved.¹²⁴

According to Gaertner, one reason the positive feelings are not generalized to the wider

¹²⁴ Samuel L. Gaertner, et. al., 196-197.

outgroup is because members of the contact group are considered to be exceptions to the rule, not typical of the larger group.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the demonstration project and the evaluation methods used. Like other progressive congregations, First Community Church is distinctive in its openness to other faith traditions, so much so that the church mission statement says, “We strive to follow the path of Jesus Christ, *while recognizing other pathways to the Divine.*” (Emphasis added.) While there are congregations in the United States that respect other faiths and see God present in them, there are also many churches that claim Christianity as the only way and that view Islam as a false and violent religion. While a bridge building experience would be needed in such a congregation, the likelihood of it occurring is probably low.

Over the course of the demonstration project, it became clear that some respondents were seeking to be helpful to me or supportive of the project by giving positive answers. This is perhaps best illustrated by a parishioner who did not hear one of the sermons, but wrote on the questionnaire in the bulletin, “I didn’t hear the sermon, but I’m sure it was great.” This tendency likely explains some of the positive responses. An unknown percentage of non-responders were probably neutral or negative about the project, but opted not to respond at all. Because not everyone who attended Islam 101 or heard the sermons completed questionnaires, a full picture of the attendees’ views was not achieved.

Attendees of Islam 101 were clearly people who wanted to learn more about

Muslims and their faith. There was likely some self-selection among those who attended the sermons, although it is impossible to know how much. It was widely known that I would be preaching about Muslim-Christian relationship building; those who did not want to hear the message or who did not support the demonstration project may have stayed home.

Given the size of First Community, the number of people who were able to participate in the bridge building experience was relatively small. This is perhaps the limitation of any activity that seeks to create one-on-one opportunities for connection, particularly in a large congregation.

Beyond the scope of this project is whether there was any secondary effect. Did people's changed opinions persist over time? Did they discuss the experience and what they learned with family and friends? Were the minds and hearts of family and friends opened to a new understanding of Islam? Follow up and evaluation of these secondary effects was beyond the parameters of the demonstration project, but it is hoped they occurred.

CHAPTER 7

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

The demonstration project called for concentrated work on two ministerial competencies: administration and preaching. In the area of preaching the goal was to expand my repertoire of sermon formats and approaches, and experiment with using technology in my sermons. Strategy #1 was to attend the Festival of Homiletics in 2013. Several preachers and lecturers focused on the use of technology in preaching. Throughout the conference, there was an emphasis on speaking to—and responding to the needs of—the digital generation. (The digital generation is composed of people born into a technology-rich world that has an impact on how they communicate, learn and understand the world around them.) The Festival of Homiletics gave me the opportunity to not only learn about using technology, but also to see this type of preaching in action.

Strategy #2 was to take a class about using the computer for displaying pictures and showing video, in order to use multimedia in a sermon. While I do not consider myself to be highly skilled in this area, the class increased my abilities to use technology in preaching and teaching. Having more skill and confidence in the use of multimedia will help me to be more effective in ministry with the digital generation. At FCC, video clips are run from by the sound engineer and not by the preacher; this requires advance

preparation, teamwork and clear instructions to the sound operator about when to roll the video clip. It is a different process from running a clip from one's own computer.

Strategy #3 was to attend the A Common Word conference at Georgetown University in October 2012. The conference was cancelled due to a winter storm.

The two sermons for the demonstration project fell on significant days in the Christian calendar, Epiphany and the First Sunday in Lent. This gave me the opportunity to preach about Muslim-Christian themes in the context of well-known Christian stories. (For a complete discussion of the content of the sermons, see chapter six. Sermon manuscripts can be found in the appendices.)

The Epiphany sermon, "Welcome the Stranger," was preached at both FCC locations. The North Campus worship space (with services at 8:30 and 10:00 am) is an informal fellowship hall with screens that allow for the use of video clips. The South Campus (with a service at 11am) is a traditional sanctuary without video capability. This means the sermon must be revised for 11:00, to incorporate the content of the video clips, without being able to show them. I used a clip of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu talking about how God is not just the God of Christians, but of all people. The second clip was a montage of religious leaders talking about the importance of connection and relationship to the future of the world.¹²⁵ The clergy from different faiths were interviewed separately for a documentary, but some parishioners had the impression they had all been gathered in one place for a multi-faith event. In retrospect, I would have explained the setting of the video more fully, so people could be more clear on what they were watching.

¹²⁵ *In God's Name*, produced by Jules and Gedeon Naudet (National Geographic Video, 2008).

The second sermon, “One Lord, One God” was included in a special music service; because of the worship setup, I was not able to use video.

Site Team Evaluation

Evaluations from site team members on the use of technology indicate experimentation and growth as I worked to incorporate new methods of preaching:

“The January 6, 2013 sermon entitled “Welcome the Stranger” was highly creative in discussing similarities among Abrahamic religions. It also involved the use of two videos to emphasize key points presented in the sermon. [A discussion of origins of the Magi] was followed by a word picture describing how a group of traditionally dressed Amish farmers encountered a group of scantily dressed college coeds on the way to a “Lady Gaga” concert and wondered “which one of us is the stranger.”

Another example of the similarity among traditions was presented with an explanation of how Judaism and Islam faiths emerged and worshipped the same God. Then a video clip was shown with Bishop Tutu stating that God existed long before Christianity and that regardless of religion all need a spirit of humility in searching for God. A second video noted that we share a common humanity and a common earth. But Deb acknowledged that building bridges between faiths is not easy and we need to be humble as we search for this commonality.” (Dick Meyer)

“Deborah has a very engaging and thought-provoking preaching style. One of her strengths involves bringing current events and issues to a level that has an impact on all individuals. Articulately identifying and comparing the common thread that runs through all religions demonstrated her vast theological knowledge and research.

It is very evident that Deborah has expanded her knowledge of all religions, especially Islam and has incorporated that knowledge effectively into her sermons with the use of video clips and innovative preaching styles.” (Lois Zook)

“The use of video clips in the sermon, “Welcome the Stranger,” was helpful. Deb always seems at ease with herself and with the congregation when she preaches. This was the first time I had seen her use video and she seemed relaxed with the use of this media also. The clips were well chosen to buttress her points. For instance, instead of reading a quote from Desmond Tutu, she used a video of him which seemed to make his thoughts grab your attention.” (Pete Diehl)

“FCC church members are accustomed to an ongoing debate about multiple faiths. However, finding ways to provide them with images, audio, video, etc. from a variety of faiths helped to reinforce a message of peace and understanding. Not only did Deb find good and relevant clips for the audience, but she also presented them in an effective and meaningful way.” (Justin Fields)

The second competency goal, administration, was to develop new skills for long-term planning, managing multiple priorities and volunteer recruitment. The fact that the demonstration project and paper were completed while maintaining a demanding pastoral schedule is the best evidence this goal was achieved. Without long-term planning and the effective management of multiple priorities the project would still be in the proposal stage. The demonstration project taught me that time and attention must be given to the work of planning; it does not happen “on its own.” I learned to be deliberate in carving out time for planning and keep it on the list of priorities in spite of the day-to-day

pressures of ministry. Sandy Turner, my colleague at FCC, is a role model for organization and planning and I benefited from her mentorship. I learned to put routines in place to keep things on track at the beginning of the project, before the magnitude of details and activities became overwhelming.

Site team members observed growth in my administrative skills: “I have seen Deborah’s administrative skills and use of technology expand as we have worked together. Statements such as, ‘That is a great way to process that’ or ‘That is a better way to track that information’ indicate that she is deliberately and consciously attempting to strengthen her administrative aspects and style while working on this project.” (Lois Zook)

“Regarding the administration competency, I witnessed Deb coordinate thorough events with Christians and Muslims that demonstrate sound work on her part. Not only were the details coordinated for location and materials, but she was also able to facilitate the event through direct leadership and well designed delegation of roles and duties.” (Justin Fields)

“In my experience as a member of the Site Team, she was always well organized in all her interactions with the Team, gave us plenty of advanced notice of meetings and the agenda, and carefully planned everything involved with the Demonstration Project.” (Dick Meyer)

“Deb was responsible for not only communicating and organizing the FCC members, but also the NICC members. She had all of our roles and duties organized (I was a story catcher). Both events produced mutifaith team building, conversation, and

even a competitive spirit.I am not sure how and what it took to get all the participants on both those days, but the result seemed to be uncommon experiences for both Christians and Muslims.As a story catcher I saw and felt: apprehension turn to willingness, nervous tensions turn to genuine smiles, and people just working to get a task done. Personality types and gender seem to be more visible than religion to this observer. Deb all the while provided the example of a loving, nonjudgmental mentor.” (Laura Adkins)

In the area of volunteer recruitment, I learned there is nothing like a project that people feel passionately about to draw volunteers. Every person who I asked to serve on my site team said, “yes” and they are all busy people with demanding schedules. Several of the people who helped in the demonstration project came to me and asked to be involved. Volunteers want to know that what they are doing is important and has the potential for making a difference; they appreciate having their *specific and individual* talents called out as valuable.

These ideas are quantified in research by the Gallup organization and described in *Growing an Engaged Church: How to Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again* by Albert L. Winseman. Winseman says the level of engagement in a church reflects what is most important to members about belonging. Those members seek to answer four questions: “What do I get? What do I give? Do I belong? How can we grow?” And he says is the “emotional connection” people feel to their church that is the key.¹²⁶ Winseman took Gallup’s research on workplace engagement and applied it to the practice of engaging church members:

¹²⁶ Albert L. Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church: How to Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again* (New York: Gallup Press, 2012), 142.

“Helping members do what they do best is good not only for the congregation, but for individuals as well. Gallup research has shown that individuals have the most room for growth in their areas of greatest talent. People are most likely to be fully engaged when they are doing what they do best. When they are asked to do something they do not have much talent for or interest in, they tend to go through the motions without feeling like they’re making a significant contribution. People who get to do what they do best in their congregations—or whose congregations help them discover what they do best—have a deep sense of being appreciated for their specific contributions.¹²⁷

Winseman’s data reveals that, “In the majority of congregations and parishes across the country, individuals’ talents and strengths go *largely unrecognized*—a huge loss of human potential that otherwise could be tapped for the transformation of society.” (Emphasis added.)¹²⁸ Winseman goes on to say that helping people do what they do best is not just a nice, friendly thing to do; it is a practical management objective.

Site team member Laura Adkins reflected on the team building portion of the project, both within FCC and with our NICC partners: “As a member of the site team, I can look back to note how Deb carefully scaffolded team building experiences for this multifaith project. First, there was the formation the development of the FCC site team. At our initial meetings in the spring of 2012, it became apparent to me that our site team was comprised of church members with different skill sets and abilities. I thought that some of the members had a perfect background, and wondered how I could make a unique contribution. As the team began to work together, Deb’s ability to value (out loud) and nurture each of the team member’s skills, allowed them to feel appreciated and to work together in a collaborative manner.”

¹²⁷ Ibid., 89, 131-132.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 88.

The recognition of gifts and talents also emerged as important in interviews with colleagues about best practices in volunteer recruitment. When one can say, “You are really good at organizing events. Would you be willing to help me?” that is a more effective invitation than a more general request such as, “We need more ushers; are you interested?” In linking people with ministries, Winseman urges leaders to begin with the interests and passions of the people rather than the needs of the church. He recommends leaders begin by asking three questions: “What are your talents and strengths? What do you love to do? If time and money were no object, what would you do for God?”¹²⁹ These questions should lead to the calling of volunteers who are excited and invigorated by what they do for the church and who grow spiritually as they do it.

Also helpful are meetings that are both efficient and fun; whatever the project, church members are seeking fellowship and community in their volunteer activities, and Winseman says, they seek spiritual growth as part of their involvement as well. Finally, gratitude expressed often and authentically tells volunteers that what they have to give is important and appreciated. Even the importance of saying, “thank you” is supported by Gallup’s research: “Human beings hate to be ignored. We are wired to *need* attention. (Emphasis original.) We thrive on reaction. Recognition should also be appropriate to, and valued by, the individual toward whom it is directed—it isn’t ‘one size fits all.’ Different people like to be praised or recognized differently.”¹³⁰ In the area of gratitude,

¹²⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 90.

Winseman offers a word of caution: avoid phoniness. Leaders, he says, must be both generous and *genuine* with praise.

A final word on development of ministerial competencies through the demonstration project comes from site team member Justin Fields, “When I think of Deb in a professional light, I am reminded of the idea that one should always strive to be proud to put his/her name on a product when it is completed. To that degree, I believe that Deb's competencies highlight a thorough self-examination of areas that she believes she can enhance to become an even stronger minister.”

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The project demonstrated that there are opportunities for new approaches and fresh thinking about interfaith engagement. The traditional model of interfaith dialogue is not and should not be our only option. Communities of faith must consider a whole menu of methods for helping people to get to know one another and better understand each other's faith tradition.

Listening to professional clergy and theologians talk about the beliefs and traditions of their faith may not be the optimal way for lay people to learn. It is certainly not the only way. Michael Kogan argues that it is “crucial that religious dialogues move beyond the elite leadership of the faiths.” He writes eloquently about the theological and ontological significance of relationship building:

Believers must be encouraged to leave fear and parochialism behind as they open themselves and their beliefs to influence by the “other.” Perhaps that other tradition possesses insights ours may have missed. Every revelation of the Infinite One must, of necessity, be partial, that is, finite. This limitation is not because God is finite, but because we are. All of us are finite bearers of the Infinite Life of God. We come closer to the Infinite Life when we realize that we are not alone. Others bear it with us.¹³¹

The power of personal narrative is a significant tool for sharing faith stories and learning about one's neighbor. That said, the project showed there is a hunger for

¹³¹ Michael S. Kogan, “Bringing the Dialogue Home,” in *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*, ed. Rebecca Kratz Mays, 61-74 (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 2008), 72.

information about Islam among Christian participants. Additionally, there was a desire among church members to learn about and attempt to understand the radical elements of Islam. The purpose of the demonstration project was to introduce church members to people in the community who are much like them and who are also Muslim. However, many Christian participants had a "Yes, but..." response to these interactions: "Yes, *these* followers of Islam are similar to me, but what about the terrorists?"

I did not include an educational event on radical Islam because I set out to focus on the majority of Muslims who are not extremists. However, I underestimated both the challenge of drawing that distinction and the considerable desire in my church members for a better understanding of the violent edge of the tradition. Diana Eck quotes one of her colleagues at Harvard, Ali Asani, about this difficulty: "I think the levels of prejudice and the ignorance about Islam in this society are so deep that it's really going to be a long struggle to educate people in America about what Islam is, that Islam is not just this monolith, and that if [extremist] Muslims do something it is not necessarily to be associated with their faith."¹³² In future activities like this one, a presentation specifically on radical Islam would respond to this need.

Humor, fun and physical activity are also excellent tools for connection. Multi-faith activities do not have to be serious and somber to be effective. In a multicultural environment careful consideration must be given to cultural norms and boundaries so that the result is connection and not misunderstanding or offense.

¹³² Eck, 223.

Relationships must be cultivated with multiple groups and constituencies for effective interfaith projects. Had I relied solely on Muslim participants from the Noor Islamic Cultural Center, one of the bridge building events would have been postponed or cancelled. (The NICC had another event schedule at the same time and had difficulty recruiting participants for both activities.) Because I had established a relationship with another organization, the Niagra Foundation, they were able to help me recruit additional Muslim participants beyond the NICC community and the project continued moving forward. The Niagra Foundation's participation also brought new perspectives that enriched the work.

The demonstration project led to First Community Church joining a partnership already in existence with the Noor Center, an area synagogue, other Christian congregations and the Hilliard YMCA, all of which are located in the Northwest area of Columbus. The group is called SAIL, Safe Alliance of Interfaith Leaders. Its motto is "Safe relationships make safe communities, which lead to a safer world."

SAIL is seeking innovative ways to build multi-faith relationships. Members have worked together to stock shelves at the city's largest food bank and organized a multi-faith learning event focused on the spirituality of food around the Thanksgiving holiday. SAIL's most unusual activity is working together to support a group of homeless men who are seeking to improve their physical health by jogging together. SAIL helped to supply the men with running shoes and SAIL volunteers take turns on Saturday mornings bringing water and fruit and cheering the men on. While the men are running, the SAIL volunteers visit together and learn more about each other.

A more direct result of the demonstration project is that the Noor Center has asked First Community to continue the bridge building events on a regular basis. The ongoing events will allow more people to participate and they can be modified and improved as we have more experiences together.

In conclusion, the opportunities for diverse multi-faith activities are infinite. They require imagination, courage, hard work and the commitment of people of all faiths who envision a future of peace. Hearts and minds can be changed with a combination of education and interpersonal connection. Above all it takes the willingness of each person to do what he or she can, one individual at a time. I will close with one of my favorite quotes from Nobel Peace Prize winner Fridtjof Nansen, "The difficult is what takes a little time; the impossible is what takes a little longer."¹³³

¹³³ David Pratt, ed., *The Impossible Takes Longer: The 1,000 Wisest Things Ever Said by Nobel Prize Laureates* (New York: Walker and Company, 2007), 3.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
PROJECT PROPOSAL

THE VIEW FROM THE DITCH
BAR NONE & NONE BARRED IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

BY

DEBORAH COUNTISS LINDSAY

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL
New York Theological Seminary
2012

Challenge Statement

As an associate minister at First Community Church in Columbus, Ohio, I have observed that some parishioners believe negative stereotypes about Muslims that fuel anxiety and fear. This Demonstration Project will create a process for members of the congregation and a nearby mosque to interact, learn from each other and initiate relationships.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING.....	84
CHAPTER TWO	
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE.....	87
CHAPTER THREE	
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION.....	91
CHAPTER FOUR	
EVALUATION PROCESS.....	93
CHAPTER FIVE	
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	95
CHAPTER SIX	
MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES.....	98
APPENDIX	
TIMELINE AND BUDGET.....	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	107

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

At the turn of the twentieth century, the neighborhood around First Community Church(FCC) became the first independent suburb of Columbus, Ohio. It was located in the area known as Marble Cliff, where the trolley line from downtown ended. When residents got tired of taking the trolley to the “big steeple churches” in the city center, they began planning for a new neighborhood congregation. Those planning sessions were held in the study of Dr. Washington Gladden, pastor of First Congregational Church downtown. To this day, the spirit of Washington Gladden and the Social Gospel movement are embedded in the ministries of FCC. During those founding days, local residents longed for a church that served the entire community and that could be free of denominational divisions. After a vote by the neighborhood, FCC was incorporated as a congregational church in 1910.¹³⁴

Today, FCC is affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).The church has a self-identity first articulated in 1924 as “the church of the infinite quest.” FCC focuses on the innovative and challenging,

¹³⁴ Jackie Cherry, *Reflections on Our Heritage: A History of First Community Church*. (Columbus: Self-published, 2009), 128.

valuing personal transformation through spiritual growth. In the FCC vision statement, we see ourselves as:

A diverse community of individuals, each actively seeking to make Christ's example of God's love for every person real in our world through service, study, worship and giving:
Celebrating life in groupings of families and individuals
Risking with innovation while honoring tradition
Encouraging search and empowering belief
Standing with those who suffer
Loving unconditionally

FCC is a progressive, open and affirming community of 4,000 members in worship, fellowship and mission at three locations: the South Campus in Grandview Heights, the North Campus in the Hilliard/Dublin area, and Camp Akita, a children's camp and adult retreat center in the Hocking Hills. Sunday worship attendance averages 900 over four services. While FCC is a large, program-rich institution, there is a commitment to maintaining a pastoral church. A deliberate and intentional focus on pastoral care means members' needs for comfort and ministerial presence are met during times of struggle and celebration.

FCC has always been a leading voice in progressive theology, as well as open and inclusive ministry. Early evidence of this openness appeared in 1938 with the Bar None dances for young people in the church gym. The motto was "Bar None – no bar and none barred." In the 1930s the ethnic friction in the neighborhood occurred between Anglo Protestants and Italian Catholics, but at FCC everyone was welcome to play basketball in the gym and to attend the Bar None dances. The legacy continued through the civil rights

movement up to the mid 1990s when the Governing Board of the church voted to conduct same-sex commitment ceremonies.

FCC supports a variety of missions, including a television ministry, which airs the weekly sermon on the Ohio News Network. The broadcast is deliberately viewed as a mission of the church; it was begun to offer an alternative to the predominantly fundamentalist religious programming on television. Viewership averages about 10,000 persons (7,000 households) per week.¹³⁵ Other mission activities include a commitment by FCC to cook and serve dinner at a local homeless shelter (approximately 125 meals) on Monday nights every week of the year. FCC has a food pantry, known as Heart to Heart, that provides groceries for thousands of families each year. In addition, the church supports an orphanage and medical facility in Kenya (Rafiki), a humanitarian organization in India (Deep Griha Society), and Friends of the Homeless in Columbus.

One could say a commitment to interfaith work is in the DNA of FCC. The church has a long history of creating and hosting interfaith dialogue events and worship services. Visitors to the website or the church frequently remark on our language about recognizing other pathways to the Divine; they find this surprising in a Christian church. For some it is refreshing; for others it can be off-putting. The FCC mission statement says because we believe all people are included in God's unconditional grace, we:

Strive to follow the path of Jesus Christ, while recognizing other pathways to the Divine.

Encourage each person's spiritual journey, embracing a variety of spiritual disciplines.

Understand that the words we use to express our faith are to be lived out by loving and compassionate action.

¹³⁵ Data provided by Randy Rocke, FCC Director of Mission Through Media.

Take the Bible seriously, not literally, finding more grace in the search for meaning than in absolute certainty.

Agree to differ, unite to serve, and resolve to love.¹³⁶

First Community Church is a predominantly white, upper middle class congregation that mirrors the communities it serves. It is also a well-educated congregation; the majority of adult church members have a college degree and about a third have advanced degrees. FCC shares with the United Church of Christ a conflict between its ideal of diversity and the reality of congregational make-up. As an institution, the UCC is committed to being a diverse multicultural and multiracial denomination, but most of our congregations are predominantly white. It has been nearly 50 years since Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about the segregation in American churches: “We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this.”¹³⁷ Sadly, this is still the case in many mainline Protestant churches today and First Community Church is no exception.

¹³⁶ www.FCchurch.com. Accessed May 19, 2012.

¹³⁷ From the Archives and Regional History Collections of Western Michigan University. Dr. Martin Luther King’s WMU Speech, 1963. www.wmich.edu/~ulib/archives/mlk/q-a.html Accessed May 20, 2012.

CHAPTER TWO

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

Several members of the congregation, independently of one another, presented the challenge for this project to me. My ministry took a remarkable turn in August 2010. I saw the Gainesville, Florida “pastor” on television, talking about his plan to burn Qur’ans on the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and decided to preach about it that Sunday. I spoke about the importance of respect for other faith traditions and humility about our own. I preached that Terry Jones and his plan were un-Christian and completely at odds with the gospel message. (The sermon went viral on YouTube and received media coverage in Columbus and around the world.)

The response from the pews was overwhelmingly positive; church members expressed appreciation that I said from the pulpit what they had been thinking. In the sermon I said, “We must do less talking *about* each other and more talking *to* each other.” The idea resonated with a number of congregants who came to me saying, “I want to do this, but I don’t really know any Muslims to talk to.” More than a few of the congregants had attended interfaith events and said they appreciated listening to the dialogue, but

wanted an opportunity to connect with people of the Islamic faith in a more personal manner.

While the church's response was almost entirely positive, I have also received anti-Muslim emails and anonymous newspaper articles in my church mailbox, detailing the "Islamist threat." It seems some individuals believe I am acting out of naïveté and that it is their responsibility to help me fully understand the threat. I believe they are good and decent people who are afraid, misinformed and unable to separate the faith tradition of Islam from the acts of terrorists.

As previously discussed, the community surrounding FCC is predominantly white, with a religious makeup that is almost entirely Protestant or Catholic. Parishioners who work in a very diverse environment, such as The Ohio State University or several of the larger public school districts, engage with people of other ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. But others, particularly those who are retired, do not have many opportunities to meet people who are different from them. For the most part, it is not a question of narrow-mindedness or lack of willingness; it is more a function of time and place.

Around this time, I became aware of research published in the book *American Grace* that demonstrated the power of an individual knowing just one other person from a group of others. Knowing just one person proved to be an important inroad to reducing stereotypes and fear of a group of people who are different from oneself. As Dagmar Grefe writes, "It is not belief systems, but people who encounter each other."¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Dagmar Grefe, *Encounters for Change: Interreligious Cooperation in the Care of Individuals and Communities* (Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon, 2011), xviii.

Members of my Site Team share this longing to create opportunities for people to connect with each other. Two of the Site Team members, Justin Fields and Laura Adkins work as school guidance counselors in large multiracial, multicultural school districts. Both have some training in cultural diversity, both engage regularly with Muslim students, yet both expressed a need and desire to learn more. Another Site Team member, Makenzie Adkins, is a high school junior who is active in a diversity dialogue group at school. Makenzie has said their best sessions are when young people “just laugh and talk together.” So: how can such a connection be achieved for members of my congregation at First Community Church?

With the increase in anti-Muslim attitudes since 9/11, there is an immediate and urgent need for projects to reduce stereotypes and increase understanding. Our country has been at war in Muslim countries for ten years now; the cost in human life for people of all faiths in the wars in Iran and Afghanistan must cause God great sadness. Some members of FCC are unable to distinguish between terrorists who claim God to *justify* their actions and decent people of Islamic faith who rely on God to *guide* their actions. The stereotypes are fed by the media and the Internet in particular, where xenophobic stories are easily found and have the appearance of credibility. The stereotypes are also fed in the political world by groups and individuals who seek to fan the flames of mistrust and fear for their own purposes.

FCC is situated in a community that is ideally suited for Muslim-Christian bridge building. The Noor Islamic Cultural Center(NICC) is located just seven miles from our church buildings and we essentially serve the same area of northwest Columbus. The

concerns of our people are essentially the same: raising families, paying the mortgage, saving for college, serving the community and participating in a faith community. The challenge is perhaps not so much to discuss and understand differences, as it is to recognize the many beliefs, convictions and values we share.

I like to think author Mahmoud Ayoub would approve of a Christian-Muslim bridge building project in the heart of the Midwest. In writing about the historical foundations of Christian/Muslim conflict, Ayoub maintains the violence of today's world is not the result of theology and religious disagreement, but is more the result of disparities in wealth and opportunity. The issue is not "God, revelation and Moses...but land, oil and the destiny of peoples." Because of global inequities, Ayoub claims the ideal point of contact and dialogue is here and now:

The purpose of dialogue ought to be better understanding, peaceful coexistence, and the establishment of a fellowship of faith among people of faith. This is only possible among people enjoying the same standard of security, economic well-being, and social equality in all respects. This ideal cannot be achieved between the rich and technologically advanced West and the Muslims of the so-called Third World. It must begin in Europe and North America where Muslims and Christians share the factory workbench, the school, community center, and even the cemetery.¹³⁹

My expected outcome is for 50 members of FCC to have a personal encounter with a Muslim member of the community, report they have a greater understanding of Islam and feel more comfortable around their Muslim neighbors.

¹³⁹ Mahmoud Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays On Dialogue*, ed. Irfan A. Omar (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007), 58.

CHAPTER THREE

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

Goal 1 Raise awareness among members of FCC of the need for Christian-Muslim relationship building.

Strategy 1 – Devote three of my monthly newsletter articles to interfaith issues.(Deborah Lindsay/ Nov 2012-Jan 2013)

Strategy 2 – Preach sermons on two Sundays about the need for Christian-Muslim bridge building. (Deborah Lindsay/ Jan-Feb 2013)

Strategy 3 – Host an educational information session at FCC about the basics of the Islam. (Site Team and Noor Islamic Center partners/ Feb 2013)

Evaluation of Goal 1 - I will use an evaluation instrument to demonstrate that 35% of respondents at FCC have grown in their understanding of Islam and the need for Christian-Muslim bridge building.

Goal 2 – Build a team to help develop the Christian-Muslim experience.

Strategy 1 – Develop criteria for skills needed to implement the Demonstration Project. (Deborah Lindsay and Site Team/ Nov 2012)

Strategy 2 – Identify project partners at the Noor Islamic Cultural Center (NICC) and conduct joint meetings with Site Team and NICC partners to engage in visioning for the Demonstration Project and begin bonding among team members.

(Deborah Lindsay, Site Team, NICC team/ Oct-Nov 2012)

Evaluation of Goal 2 – 75% of the members of the Site Team will be asked to provide a narrative assessment (two to three paragraphs) of the team-building effort.

Goal 3 - Create and implement Christian-Muslim bridge building and dialogue experience.

Strategy 1 – Design and test an activity for Christians and Muslims that involves working together in a light-hearted way to achieve a common goal, followed by a period of dialogue. (Deborah Lindsay and Site Team/ Oct-Nov 2012)

Strategy 2 – Conduct two activity/dialogue sessions for adults and youth. (Deborah Lindsay, Site Team, NICC, Volunteers/ Feb-April 2013)

Strategy 3 – Create an educational tool for other congregations to replicate the activity. (Deborah Lindsay, Graphic Artist, Site Team/ April-June 2013)

Evaluation of Goal 3 - I will use an evaluation instrument to demonstrate that 35% of responding participants gained new knowledge about Islam and feel more comfortable around a Muslim person.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION PROCESS

After completion of Goal 1, I will use an evaluation tool to assess the effectiveness of this effort. My target is that at least 35% of respondents will report they have learned new information about Islam and that they have a better understanding of how the Biblical call to love my neighbor applies to interfaith relationships.

The Site Team will be asked to evaluate Goal 2. Site Team members will be asked to offer a brief narrative assessment (one to two paragraphs) of whether the team-building goal was achieved.

Evaluation of Goal 3 will be accomplished using an evaluation instrument to be completed before and after the bridge building and dialogue sessions. My target is that at least 35% of respondents from FCC will report they had the opportunity to interact with one or more members of the community who are Muslim and that they feel more comfortable with or more warmly toward their Muslim neighbors as a result.

I am fortunate to have several members of my Site Team with experience and skill in evaluation, so the Site Team will play an integral role in designing the evaluation instruments.

Additional angles of evaluation will be accomplished through observation by me and members of the Site Team during implementation of the Demonstration Project and follow-up conversations with participants who indicate a willingness to be interviewed. These interviews will generate narrative evaluations about potential change in comfort levels and positive feelings toward the “other” as a result of participation in the Demonstration Project.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Biblical Research and Analysis

Question 1 - How can a Muslim be my neighbor?

Publication of *A Common Word Between Us and You* in 2007 introduced love of the neighbor as a starting point in bridge building between Muslims and Christians. Does what Christians call the greatest commandment apply to our relationships with followers of Islam? Assuming that it is the starting point for Christians, what did the Gospel writer mean by πλοσίν (neighbor) and do our traditions share a common understanding of what it means to be a neighbor?

This chapter will look at what the text meant to hearers of the first century and what it means to us today. Scriptural research will employ the historical-critical method and will include word study, and examination of the original context of the text (time, place, cultural norms, characters in the story and their relationship with each other).

Marjorie Suchocki and her book *Divinity and Diversity: A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism* will play a role in my understanding of neighbor. Suchocki sees pluralism through the lens of process theology; she interprets a growing understanding of

– and connection to – other faiths to be part of the unfolding of the reign of God on earth.

In fact she writes, “A theology of the reign of God calls us toward a new affirmation of religious pluralism.”¹⁴⁰

Social Analysis and Research

Question 2 - *What are some examples of how Muslim-Christian bridge building is happening today?*

I will examine examples of how Muslims and Christians are learning about each other and building relationships. What can be learned from recent controversies over the building of a mosque in a particular community and the response of the local faith community? What does the research by Putnam and Campbell in *American Grace* say about how the religious “other” comes to be known and better understood?¹⁴¹

Practical Methodology Analysis and Research

Question 3 - *How does change and transformation happen, particularly regarding prejudice and stereotypes?*

What can the field of social psychology tell us about how change happens? What are the obstacles to change? Explore a sampling of what is known about dismantling stereotypes, reducing suspicion and fear, and opening people to better understanding of each other. Can social identity theory be applied to congregations and different faith traditions? Dagmar Grefe plays a role in my understanding of this process and the connection between information and anxiety, “A way to remain in our comfort zone and

¹⁴⁰ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *Divinity and Diversity: a Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

¹⁴¹ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

avoid feelings of anxiety altogether is to avoid contact with those who are different from us or who represent a foreign culture or belief system. We avoid close contact and remain ignorant, which just increases our fear of interaction.”¹⁴² I will address the theological implications of change and transformation and the Biblical promise that we have the capacity to become a new creation.

¹⁴² Grefe, 44.

CHAPTER SIX

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

The Process

All members of the Site Team participated in the competency evaluation process. They were (in alphabetical order): Laura Adkins, Makenzie Adkins, Rev. Pete Diehl, Dr. Marcia Early, Dr. Justin Fields, Dr. Richard Meyer and Lois Zook. At our meeting on March 11, 2012, I explained the assessment process to the team. On March 18, 2012, I shared my self-evaluation. Next, the team met without me in the room to discuss their individual assessments and then I returned and we discussed their evaluation with me. A composite summary of my self-evaluation and the Site Team's assessment follows.

The Assessments

*Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition: **Continue***

Deborah is knowledgeable about the history and traditions of Christianity in general and the history and polity of the United Church of Christ in particular. She effectively shares this knowledge in preaching and teaching. In addition, she uses occasions of routine church business, such as the nomination of individuals to the Governing Board, as

teaching moments about the primacy of congregational leadership in United Church of Christ. (The Governing Board is the seat of governance for First Community Church.)

Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions: Continue

Deborah's knowledge of other faith traditions, particularly Islam, has increased significantly over the last 18 months and she has shared her learning with the congregation in a variety of ways. She utilizes scripture to demonstrate how an appreciation of the other is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In preaching she often quotes texts from other traditions to demonstrate the value of other faith traditions and she urges parishioners to examine problematic texts in the Bible.

Ability to engage productively in dialogue: Continue

Deborah approaches multifaith dialogue with the view that all traditions have important perspectives to offer and values to share, and that all traditions can benefit from self-critique as well. She seeks to build community in every group in which she participates. In a weekly study group she often tells stories of her own experiences that make a point concerning a situation the group is discussing. The result is a sense of community in which the group is indirectly encouraged to share personal stories that are relevant to the discussion. When asked a biblical or theological question she has clear answers and if she can't answer, she is at ease saying so and promises to find the information and report back. Her modeling in these situations seems to encourage the group members not to need to be "all knowing".

Ability to interpret sacred texts: Develop

One of Deborah's gifts is preaching. Her sermons reflect depth, serious study and attention to the Biblical text. She is skilled at storytelling and using humor to make a point; she is willing to use her own failings and fears as illustrations without allowing the sermon to be overly self-focused. Deborah's sermons are well organized and lead to a clearly defined conclusion.

Candidate seeks to learn more about Islam and incorporate these learnings into awareness-raising sermons. Candidate seeks to be intentional about experimenting with a wider variety of preaching formats and with the use of multi-media in preaching.

Ability as a worship leader: Continue

Deborah is a skilled worship leader; she has an open, warm and welcoming demeanor that creates a sense of hospitality. Deborah's inclusion of other faith traditions was illustrated in the design and implementation of First Community's service to commemorate the tenth anniversary of 9/11. This was a first-of-its kind service with shared leadership by our Senior Minister, a Rabbi and an Imam. (FCC has had many ecumenical and interfaith services, but this was the first time an Imam was included in the leadership.) Deborah was insistent that all share equally in leadership of the service, as opposed to some being "guests." She also seeks teaching moments in worship, for example in a recent baptism, she spoke about the significance of water for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Facilitating transformation: Continue

Deborah is most likely to adopt the prophetic role when a specific issue or event in the news inspires her or when the text directly raises a justice issue. She is unafraid to engage

in a critique of the church and its role in the world. She is able to speak the truth in love, but could more intentionally seek opportunities to challenge her congregation.

Ability as multifaith leader: Continue

Deborah appreciates the abilities and talents of others and encourages them to see those gifts in themselves. She has a knack for helping people to feel good about themselves and capable of reaching goals. She models an openness toward and acceptance of all people in her own conduct, at church and in the community as well. She is loving and accepting, always caring and “there” for people; this is one of her natural talents. Because First Community Church has a presence on TV and worship services are streamed live on the Internet, we are especially appreciative of the skills Deborah brought from her work in television. Her preaching and worship leadership is inclusive and welcoming; she connects well with people watching from home and raises their comfort level with our church.

Ability to serve as a multifaith religious educator: Continue

Deborah has demonstrated her courage in preaching and teaching about the need for multifaith bridge building. Her pastoral abilities support her in understanding where people are and how they can move forward to new understandings. Occasionally in the weekly study group, individuals find themselves becoming distressed during discussions about matters of faith. Deborah not only has the ability to sense this, but also to gently ask a question or make an observation that helps the person move toward dealing with the issue. Her pastoral counseling abilities are obvious in these situations.

Ability as counselor in a multifaith context: Continue

Deborah's primary work at First Community Church is as a pastoral counselor, which she practices in group and one-on-one settings. She is guided by Family Systems theory and Carl Rogers' notion of unconditional positive regard that involves complete acceptance of what a person says and does. Deborah views unconditional positive regard as a reflection of God's view of all creation. She is an open and authentic person, which helps others to reveal themselves to her and share their innermost selves. She relates well to people of all ages. As parishioners we appreciate that she is spontaneous and has a great sense of humor (always used appropriately), which helps people connect to her.

Spiritual Leader: Continue

Deborah is an effective spiritual leader, able to assist individuals and groups in their spiritual journey. In word and deed, she models her conviction that God loves all people without exception. She is open to a variety of spiritual disciplines and approaches and encourages that openness in others. There is a joyful quality to her spiritual leadership. In community Deborah is an excellent representative of First Community Church and the inclusive gospel message. When Deborah preached a sermon about the burning of Qur'ans, which went viral on You Tube, it demonstrated a spiritual presence and power. Many of us forwarded the link to friends from around the country and the typical response might be characterized as wow. I believe the "wow" was a reaction to her "spiritual presence and power".

Witness: Skipped by Site Team

The Site Team opts to skip the category of witness for assessment because we have covered these qualities in other categories.

Administrator: Develop

Many of Deborah's responsibilities require administration skills, particularly the preparation of weddings and funerals, the teaching of Bible study, and her leadership of the Service Board. She is able to manage these functions, but does not consider it a strength. As members of the Site Team, we suspect she is better at administration than she realizes. Additionally we recognize that as a pastoral care specialist, Deborah's primary work is often of an emergency nature and does not lend itself to long-term planning.

Candidate wants to develop her administrative skills and views the implementation of the Demonstration Project as an excellent opportunity to achieve this. She seeks to increase her use of technology to facilitate administrative tasks. She has chosen members of her Site Team with an eye toward their skills in planning and implementation and seeks to learn from them. Candidate is urged to focus on what comes most naturally to her and seek out others with different talents to support her.

Organizer: Category skipped by site team

The Site Team opts to skip the category of community organizer for assessment because we have covered these qualities in other categories.

Professional: Continue

Deborah consistently maintains a professional demeanor and is always seeking educational opportunities to enhance her skills. She approaches her work with both seriousness and enthusiasm. As defined by the UCC Minister's Code of Ethics, her professionalism is measured by her commitment to: keep all confidences; approach all members of the congregation as equal; guard against the abuse of trust, power and

authority in the pastoral position; seek advice and counsel of other professionals when necessary; maintain personal integrity.

Competencies Chosen for Development

As Preacher: I will expand my repertoire of sermon formats and approaches, and experiment with using technology in my sermons.

Strategy 1 - Attend Festival of Homiletics in 2013.

Strategy 2 - Take an Apple class about using the computer for displaying pictures and showing video, in order to use multi-media in a sermon.

Strategy 3 – Attend A Common Word conference at Georgetown University in Oct. 2012.

Evaluation of Preaching Goal:

Members of the Site Team will be asked to complete a brief narrative assessment about my preaching that will incorporate new sermon formats (for me) and use of multi-media.

As Administrator: I will develop new skills for long-term planning, managing multiple priorities and volunteer recruitment.

Strategy 1 – Seek mentorship from Sandy Turner, my colleague at FCC.

Strategy 2 – Interview two professionals (clergy or lay) about best practices in volunteer engagement.

Evaluation:

I will seek ongoing feedback from colleagues and the Site Team about my growth in administrative skills and areas for continued focus, and I will engage in deliberate self-reflection about my efforts to grow in this area.

APPENDIX

TIMELINE AND BUDGET

Date	Task	Person Responsible	Funding Source
October 2012	Proposal approved by Director	WL	
Oct 2012	Obtain approval from NYTS on advisor	DL	
Nov, Dec, Jan 2012	Series of newsletter articles with multifaith elements (Goal 1)	DL	
Nov. 2012	Meet with Site Team to identify volunteers for group activity, schedule events, design evaluation tool for sermons and events (Goal 1, 2 & 3)	DL and Site Team (ST)	
Nov. 2012	Meet with NICC* partners to determine dates for activities (Goal 2 & 3)	DL, ST	
Nov. 2012	Research	DL	
Nov. 2012	Schedule multi-media class at Apple	DL	
Dec. 2012	Identify volunteers to assist with evaluations before and after sermons (Goal 1 & 2)	DL, ST Guild 7 Service Bd	
Dec. 2012	Meet with media staff to learn how to use screen at North Campus	DL	

Jan. 2013	Planning meeting with Site Team and NICC partners	DL, ST, NICC	
Jan/Feb. 2013	Preach two Sundays- multiple services (Goal 1)	DL	
Feb-Mar 2013	Site team evaluates sermons	ST	
Feb. 2013	Islam 101 teaching after worship (Goal 1 & 2)	DL, NICC	Donation
Feb-April 2013	2 Activity/dialogue sessions (Goal 3)		Grant or donation if needed for supplies- \$500.00
Feb-April 2013	Follow-up interviews with participants (Goal 3)	DL, ST	
March/April 2012	Site Team meeting - project assessment	DL, ST	
April – May 2013	Compile and analyze evaluation instrument results (Goal 3)	DL with help as needed from ST	
June 2013	Meet with advisor (EO)	DL, EO	
June-Aug 2013	Research	DL	
Sept 2013	Meet with advisor	DL, EO	
Aug- Sept 2013	Writing	DL, with periodic review and comment from ST	
Oct. 2013	Draft complete – Review with ST and advisor	DL, ST, EO	
Nov. 2013	Rewrite	DL	
Dec. 2013	Submit to editor	DL	
Jan 2013	Submit to seminary readers	DL	

Noor Islamic Cultural Center

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Appendix B NEWSLETTER COLUMNS

Newsletter Column: *Did You Know?*

December 2012

When my son was little one of his favorite expressions was, “Mom, did you know...?” followed by details of whatever interesting discovery he had made that day. It was always neat to hear about the new thing he had learned or seen or experienced.

Did you know? is a good interfaith question for Christians as we enter into the holy season of Advent and Christmas. It is a time of sacred waiting and expectation, as we anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. We remember the story of his parents, Mary and Joseph, making the long and arduous trip to Bethlehem. We cherish the tale of them searching for a place to stay and when none could be found, settling into a stable where their baby was born. We sing songs we have known since childhood, “The cattle are lowing; the poor baby wakes. But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.”

Did you know the baby Jesus and Mary are also revered figures in Islam? In the faith of Islam, Jesus is a beloved prophet and a messenger, revered for his life and message of peace and compassion. Both Jesus and Muhammad are considered to be messengers of God, along with figures of the First Testament such as Abraham and Noah. According to Islamic tradition, the Torah was delivered through Moses, the Gospels through Jesus and the Qur'an through Muhammad.

The Muslim poet Rumi wrote a series of Jesus poems like this one that describes Jesus as a healer of the world:

Where Jesus lives, the great-hearted gather.
We are a door that's never unlocked.
If you are suffering any kind of pain,
Stay near the door. Open it.
Christ is the population of the world,
And every object as well.

The Qur'an affirms that Mary was a young virgin; as in Christianity, the virgin birth was believed to be a sign of Jesus' specialness. The Qur'an says, "And remember her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples." (In the Qur'an "we" refers to God.)

The common reverence for Jesus and Mary is just one example of the common ground between Christians and Muslims. The more we learn about each other, the more we learn about the values and convictions we share. Of course we have our differences, but—take heart—they need not divide us.

This newsletter and future events are part of my doctoral project on building bridges between Christians and Muslims. Please help by going on the web to complete a very brief survey (it will take less than one minute to complete) about this article. Go to this web address: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DecemberFirstnews>. You can also go to the www.FCchurch.com and click on the button called Islam 101 to respond to the survey.

Thank you in advance for helping with my research, which is a critical piece of the project. I also hope you will participate on January 27 when we offer *Islam 101*, a one-hour seminar on the basics of the Islamic faith. The seminar is at 11:15 am, immediately after worship in Grace Hall at North Campus. The teacher is Jeri Milburn, a

smart and energetic Muslim woman from the Noor Islamic Center in Dublin, who promises that no questions are off-limits. In addition, I will be preaching on January 6 about the common ground our faith traditions share.

Newsletter Column: *Bar None in 2013?*

January 2013

They're not real Americans and they're taking over the neighborhood.

They want to convert everyone to their religion...and their religion makes no sense.

We are not letting our kids play with their kids – no way.

These are the kinds of things you might have heard around the neighborhood of First Community Church...75 years ago. Oh, you thought I was talking about *Muslim* stereotypes? In the 1930s, the ethnic friction in the neighborhood around First Community (we had only one location then) occurred between Anglo Protestants and Italian Catholics. And “friction” is a polite word for it. In those days, the church had a gym and a visionary minister named Roy Burkhart. “Burkie” created quite a ruckus when he invited the Italians into the gym to play basketball. From the perspective of 2013 it sounds almost laughable, but it was a real point of tension then.

To bridge the divide and to give young people a safe place to gather and have “wholesome fun,” Burkhart initiated the *Bar None* dances. The slogan was No Bar and None Barred. Everyone – *everyone* – was welcome at the church and First Community was dedicated to breaking down walls and eliminating barriers between God’s people. That remains our work today.

The most damaging religious divide of the current era is between Muslims and Christians. Worldwide, the number of followers of Islam and Christianity is roughly the same; together we make up more than half the world’s population. As many have said

before me, without peace between us, there can be no peace. Indeed, the future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

Over the Christmas holidays a member of our church asked me, “As we were singing the carol about love and peace I was wondering, do Muslims talk about those things too? Do they talk in their mosques about caring and compassion?” The answer is most definitely, “yes.”

In Islam God is understood to be both loving and the source of love. Every chapter in the Qur'an (with the exception of two or three) begins, “In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful...” Muslims are called by their sacred text to show mercy, compassion and generosity to other people, following God's example.

In the Second Testament, Jesus teaches how we are supposed to treat each other: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, care for the sick and visit the person in prison. (Matthew 25) The Qur'an has a similar message and even quotes Jesus, saying, "O you who believe! Be helpers of God -- as Jesus the son of Mary said to the disciples, 'Who will be my helpers in (the work of) God?' Said the disciples, 'We are God's helpers!'"

Both Christians and Muslims believe we are called to love God and love our neighbor. It is a sacred foundation for both traditions. The *Bar None* dances were one way of living out the message that the doors of First Community Church – and hopefully our hearts as well – are barred to no one. Such inclusiveness is in the DNA of our congregation and it's why *Bar None* in Christian-Muslim relations is a worthy New Year's resolution for all of us.

Please help in my doctoral research by completing a very brief survey about the column you have just read. You can find the survey on the web at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/firstnewsJanuary>. Or: You can go to the church homepage at www.fcchurch.com and click on the button “Islam 101.”

Newsletter Column: *Women in Islam*

February 2013

What is your impression of what life is like for women in Islam? Unless you actually know a Muslim woman, you may picture an oppressed and fearful person, married at a young age against her will, subjected to genital mutilation, bullied by her husband and covered from head to toe in a black or blue burqa. She is refused an education and basic personal liberties. This does describe some women in Afghanistan for example, but it is far from what life is like for the majority of Muslim women around the world and it has nothing at all to do with the Qur'an. Nothing. Are some Muslim women abused and oppressed? Yes. Does this reflect the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad? No. Are some Christian women abused and oppressed? Yes. Does this reflect the Bible and the teachings of Jesus? No.

I have learned from many sources that the primary message of the Qur'an is one of equality between men and women. For example, "As for those who lead a righteous life, male or female, while believing, they enter Paradise; without the slightest injustice." (4:124) Numerous verses use the language "male or female," which underscores that God's love and mercy is for both, without distinction. The Muslim Women's League (MWL) says the Quran "seeks to elevate the relationship between man and woman to one of equality, sheltering and shielding each other."

Do women have to cover themselves up? The Qur'an urges both men and women to dress modestly, but the decision to wear a headscarf is between a woman and God. Female circumcision or genital mutilation was a tribal practice that pre-dated Islam. It

remains a tribal practice that is not endorsed by mainstream Islam or the vast majority of Muslims.

Let's look at the issue of multiple wives, because it is an excellent illustration of how important it is to put the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad in their historical context (as we do with the Bible). In ancient times, a woman without a husband or sons to provide for her was destined to a life of abject poverty. Taking in another wife was a way of providing for widows and was a common practice, especially in times of war when large numbers of men were killed.

There was abuse of the practice in pre-Islamic Arabia; men took as many wives as they wanted regardless of whether they could provide for them. Muhammad, as a reformer, said a man could take *only* four wives and *only* if he could love them all equally. The man must love and treat each of his wives exactly the same, "in every regard." Then later, the Qur'an says that's probably impossible. Today the vast majority of Muslims (well over 85% according to the MWL) practice monogamy.

I have found the Muslim Women's League (a partner of the Harvard Pluralism Project) to be a good source of information about women and Islam. The MWL seeks to educate men and women, Muslims and people of other faiths about the misinterpretation and misapplication of religious texts. You can learn more at www.mwlusa.org

Speaking of misinterpretation, let me leave you with the perspective of an elder in the Apostolic Ministries of America on female clergy: "God has never called a woman to preach the Gospel and never will. It matters not who stands for it or justifies it. Any church that has women preachers doesn't believe in the Bible. I say unto you, have no

part of that evil doctrine.” The words of both the Bible and the Qur'an can be abused and corrupted. Take heart: words of faith, hope and love reside in both.

Please help with Rev. Lindsay's Doctor of Ministry research, by answering a very brief questionnaire about this column. Go to www.fcchurch.com and click on “Islam 101” on the homepage. (You can also pick up a paper copy of the questionnaire at the church reception desk.) And be sure to attend her next sermon (February 17) on Building Bridges Between Christians and Muslims. Thank you for your help!

Appendix C SERMONS

Sermon: *Welcome the Stranger*

Epiphany/ January 6, 2013

Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV)

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The story of the magi is such a beloved part of the whole Christmas drama.

Sometimes we call them the three kings, but they were really astrologists, and remember, at the time of Jesus' birth, astrology was considered to be a science. (Today, some people still believe it's a science.)

At the time, kings and other people in power consulted astrologists who consulted the stars for direction in decision-making. That's not really what captures our imagination in the story though. Probably all of you have—at one time or another—looked up into the night sky at that broad expanse of stars and it takes your breath away. Now imagine there being one star, so bright, so luminous that it can point you to a place, a tiny house in a tiny town.

This story is so well-loved and so well-known to us. But the people in the story were not well known to each other, in fact they were complete strangers and not just because they'd never met before. The magi were high ranking, distinguished and respected men in the king's court. It was not at all in their world or their experience to visit a humble peasant family, most surely not to visit a small child, and most certainly not to bring extravagant gifts. This was not a culture in which people of different class or status mixed with each other; their contact with each other would have been in the role of slaves or servants in the household. For sure, Mary and Joseph had never had visitors like this.

It reminds me of a story that I heard a long time ago. A group of Amish furniture builders had been asked to do some work for a college up near Cleveland. They were going to build pieces that were custom-made for the dorm rooms and student apartments. A dean of the college was showing them around the campus and showing them the rooms where their handcrafted furniture would be placed. So, you have this group of 30 Amish men, wearing traditional hats, beards and trousers with suspenders, and as they're walking around campus, they come face-to-face with half a dozen young women who

were headed to the Lady Gaga concert downtown. They had tattoos, piercings, and the fans wore clothing, or the lack thereof, that paid homage to the pop star.

The dean described this as one of the more bizarre scenes he's encountered on Cleveland's streets. One of the Amish builders leaned over to him and said: "We're trying to figure out which one of us... thinks the other... is stranger."¹⁴³

I have a hunch that's a bit what it felt like when the magi stumbled on this humble little house in which Mary and Joseph were living. But the holy family welcomed them and received their gifts. Mary and Joseph didn't reject them because they weren't Jews; they would have been justified because this practice of astrology and magic really went against teachings of the Torah. But in spite of the difference in class, religion, ethnic background, these very different people were drawn together.

The magi are described as "wise men from the East". Where did they come from? They are believed to have come from Persia, the land that we know today as Iran and Iraq. The wise men, these beloved figures from the Christmas story (their little figures are in every nativity scene), they came from Iran and Iraq. I am fascinated by the fact that in that room with the dirt floor, with Mary, Joseph, Jesus and the wise men, we have the seeds of what would someday be the Abrahamic faiths.

At the time, there was no Christianity and no Islam. Christianity would really develop as a religion separate from Judaism only after Jesus died, and Islam came into being with the Prophet Mohammed 600 years later. But when that star brought them

¹⁴³ Michael K. McIntyre, "Cleveland allows RTA buses to drive faster on Euclid Avenue, Amish Go Gaga," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 July 2010.

together there were no different faith traditions, no interfaith dialogue, just people drawn together by the power of God.

Judaism and Islam played similar roles in their own cultures; they proclaimed one God instead of the multiple gods and idols worshipped by pagan cultures. People often ask whether Muslims or Christians worship the same God. The answer is yes, but it's often hard for religious people to appreciate that *their* image of God probably isn't the whole story of who God really is:

Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa says it like this: God is not a Christian.

We do scant justice and honor to our God if we want, for instance, to deny that Mahatma Gandhi was a truly great soul, a holy man who walked closely with God. Our god would be too small if he was not also the God of Gandhi: if God is one, as we believe, then he is the only God of all his people, whether they acknowledge him as such or not. God does not need us to protect him. Many of us perhaps need to have our notion of God deepened and expanded....God remains God, whether God has worshippers or not.¹⁴⁴

When we approach conversations about faith with a healthy dose of humility, it becomes almost impossible to claim we Christians have all the answers, that we know it all, and that God looks, acts, and thinks like we do. You might think of different faiths as people in one house looking through different windows. We're all looking out at the one God, but we're looking through different windows. We see from different perspectives, different angles, different points of view. We "see" differently, yet what we see is the same, the one God.

¹⁴⁴ Desmond Tutu, *God is Not a Christian: Speaking truth in times of crisis* (London: Rider Books, 2011), 7-8.

I must confess to you that as I prepared to preach this sermon, I was haunted by a story that's been in the news this week, a terrible story about a woman in New York City who pushed a man in front of an oncoming subway train. He died instantly. His name was Sunando Sen and he was 46 years old. The woman who pushed him told police: "I pushed a Muslim off the train tracks because I hate Hindus and Muslims ever since 2001 when they put down the Twin Towers I've been beating them up."¹⁴⁵

Sunando Sen was a Hindu, an immigrant from India who was pursuing the American dream. He had just opened his own printing business and friends say he worked seven days a week to make it successful. He loved American movies and music; he was always upbeat, gentle and kind-hearted. Ignorance, fear, anger, violence, evil are characteristics of the brutal world of King Herod and they are alive and well in every corner of our world today, including the heart of America.

St. Augustine once said, "Humility is the medicine required to cure us all." The importance of humility is one of the things that Jews, Christians and Muslims (that is followers of Islam) have in common. Humility is central for all three. In early Jewish thought, humility was considered the first and principal virtue and the starting point for all others. One of the ancient Hebrew commentaries says: "I saw an upside down world, what is on high (exalted) is down below (humble) and what is below is on high." And then centuries later you have Jesus saying "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

¹⁴⁵ Marc Santora, "Woman Is Charged With Murder as a Hate Crime in a Fatal Subway Push," *New York Times*, 29 December 2012.

And even later in the Muslim tradition, the notion of humility is found in the many understandings of the word Islam itself, which means surrender or the peace that results from an attitude of surrender to God. Islam talks about how you must lose yourself in God; Jesus said, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." There's another tradition that recognizes the importance of humility. In the twelve-step recovery programs, the primary message can be summed up in one sentence: "God is God and I am not."

The love of one God is a fundamental belief shared by Christians and Muslims... another is the love of neighbor. Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself. He also said, "Love one another even as I have loved you." The Prophet Muhammad said, "Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."

But building bridges is about more than the theology and beliefs we share. It's about what we have in common as human beings, as children, parents, brothers, sisters, friends. What we have in common is life and this life is a gift from God.

Epiphany is about "holy otherness." Epiphany demonstrates that God will do whatever it takes to reach out to all people. God will do whatever it takes to embrace all people. God will do whatever it takes to bring all people to the table of the holy banquet of love and grace. If God will do whatever it takes, shouldn't we be willing to do the same?

Amen.

Sermon: *One God, One Lord*

First Sunday in Lent/ February 13, 2013

Romans 10:8b-13 (NRSV)

"The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, a time of preparation before Easter. Officially, Lent is a season of repentance, a time of making personal sacrifice to get closer to God.

You know, when I was growing up, my family wasn't into Lent very much. However, my best friend was the daughter of a Lutheran pastor and most of my other friends were Catholic, and Lent was big in their families. I mean big. My friends were always giving up something for Lent. There was a lot of energy around giving up chocolate or drinking pop or even TV for the "really" holy ones. (Now that I think of it, there were only four channels back then, so they weren't giving up *all* that much.)

Does any of this sound familiar? Nowadays, people are giving up texting or talking on their cell phones or tweeting on Twitter. I actually saw a post on Twitter that said, "Decided to give up Facebook for Lent, but not Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest." Now, that is what I call sacrifice!

It may not be like it was when we were kids but the idea is still very much alive. As a spiritual discipline, go without something that matters to you and turn that focus to God. The 40 days of Lent commemorate the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert, fasting and facing temptation. For most people, giving up something that matters is a struggle. And in this, our season of Lent has a lot in common with the Islamic notion of jihad. That's right, I said Jihad.

When we think: "jihad," we think holy war. And that may be what it means to fanatics and terrorists, but what the vast majority of Muslims understand "jihad" to be is "struggling in the way of God." The way of God being goodness, justice, mercy and compassion. It is a personal, spiritual endeavor.

This term is so powerful in a negative sense that a group of Muslims ran an ad campaign about what individuals say *their* Jihad is. This is how ordinary Muslims, people like you and me, describe their personal jihad: "My jihad is to march on despite losing my son." "My jihad is not to take the simple things in life for granted." "My jihad is to build bridges through friendship."

Such is the concept as it is lived by ordinary Muslims, with Jihad meaning "struggling uphill in order to get to a better place." The organizers of the ad campaign want people to understand jihad as the spiritual endeavor it is for them:

As Muslims, we are taught to put forth a concerted and noble effort against injustice, hate, misunderstanding, war, violence, poverty, hunger, abuse or whatever challenge big or small we face in daily life, with the purpose of getting to a better place.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ <http://myjihad.org>. (accessed October 23, 2013).

I recognize that talking about the word “jihad,” let alone comparing it to the traditional Christian season of Lent, may be a stretch for some of you. It pushes us out of our comfort zones. That’s exactly why it’s so important to do and why it’s so important to build relationships between our religious traditions. When we build bridges, when we rub elbows with each other, we learn and we begin to understand. We stop seeing each other as categories or stereotypes and we start seeing each other as people of faith who share a belief that “God is important.” We share a conviction that there is a Creator – capital “C” – who loves the world and loves us, a God who makes God’s self known in different ways to different people in different times.

For us, as Christians, we know God through Jesus. And that is the starting point in the Romans text that we just read. The text starts there, but it ends with a broader perspective on God. It’s exactly the same no matter what a person’s religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. “Everyone who calls, ‘Help, God!’ gets help.”

This is important because the writer, Paul, is very clear that for him Jesus is Lord. But he goes on to refer to God in a way that refers more broadly to God. When Paul says anyone who cries out to God for help will receive it, he’s speaking about a specific religious conflict. He’s talking about the friction and tension that was happening in the middle of the first century, around the year 55, within the group that was following Jesus.

There were the Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah and remained devoted to Jewish traditions. And there were the non-Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, people who came from outside Judaism to follow the Jewish messiah, Jesus, but they never followed Jewish

tradition. The question was, “Who is a ‘real’ follower of Christ?” Paul’s answer was that it just doesn’t matter. Paul is taking on a hot-button issue; what he’s talking about is almost as tricky as putting jihad and Lent in the same sentence.

There are a lot of stories and people in the Bible, but we don’t read and study the Bible just for the stories; we read the Bible to let the ongoing relationship of God to us and to the world settle into our hearts and minds.

You all know the old expression, “It’s all in how you look at it.” I saw this played out literally just last week. I was in Puerto Rico on a hike through the rain forest. Our guide pointed out trees with their tops way above our heads in the canopy of the forest, the part that’s high enough that it gets sun. They were at least 25 to 30 feet high. Then he said, “Follow the trunk of the tree down to the forest floor.” We could see the “tree trunks” were growing out of the trunk of a palm tree that had fallen over. Those giant trees weren’t trees at all. They were branches of a palm tree that had tipped over on its side in a storm. The root system of a palm tree is so deep, extensive and strong that even knocked on its side, it could still grow and flourish and send out new branches.

Religions, traditions, ways of understanding God, practices for reaching toward God, all develop in all kinds of directions through people. But at the root is God and that God is the same for all of us. As you reflect on your faith during this season of Lent, I encourage you to allow this truth to settle into your heart and your mind: we all share one God and when we love each other we are fulfilling God’s dream for the world.

Amen.

Appendix D ISLAM 101 RESPONSES

Questionnaire responses: Islam 101

Thinking about Christian-Muslim relations, what do you most want to learn more about?

(105 responses)

- Quran
- What a Friday worship service is like
- Fasting
- Need to review my Christian beliefs
- Similarities between the two
- Story of Jesus through the eyes of Islam; definition of miracle and Jesus' birth and death
- Struggle-jihad and how religion provides strategy, prayers and support to resolve and overcome the struggle within self and with others
- To understand how the need to work your way into heaven affects feelings about relationship with God
- The variety of forms Islam takes; Quran; fundamental beliefs vs cultural requirements
- Not sure
- Better understanding of faith and practices; ways to establish common ground/more tolerance/respect of differences (experience ourselves as more similar than different)
- Why do genders pray separately? What are ablutions rooms? Why do you wash your feet? In praying to Mecca, how do you find it when you are in an unfamiliar place?
- Differences in Muslim faith(?) based on different countries e.g. Afghan v Pakistan
- Common ground
- Why women still don't seem to be equal to men. Oops...I just saw the myth about that but what about leaders?
- Similarities and differences
- Similarities and common beliefs
- Muslims seem to have a high level of judgment within their religion -- does this lead to judgment of non-Muslims?
- How can we actually sit in "a circle" and talk?

- Study the Quran
- How can we make our country less afraid of Muslims? Media, churches, and particularly fundamentalist churches promote this fear of "the other"
- How to bridge relationship
- Radicals and wanting to kill non-Muslims
- Geopolitical and cultural issues
- Differences as they specifically affect women
- Five Pillars
- Paths of common potential action towards mutually acceptable goals
- Similarities/differences between the two
- So much was covered that I feel I understand the basics of Islam and its shared beliefs
- Is there variation of belief among Muslims re: (1) referring to God as a "He;" (2) literal concepts of heaven and hell after life?
- Similarities between both religions
- Having this type of presentation more often would help in bridge building
- If you believe in nondiscrimination, why don't you recognize gays?
- How Christians and Muslims can work TOGETHER for peace locally and globally
- Recognizing that Islam supports peace, how do militant Muslims justify their actions and beliefs?
- Origins of religion
- How do we have Christian-Muslim events that attract enough media attention to make it a headline?
- Why is there such a strong division between violent Muslims and others
- Why is there so much tension between Muslims and other religions?
Why aren't more moderate Muslims rallying together and publicly condemning the extremists who are killing in the name of Islam? Are the moderates making efforts to reach out to the poorest and least educated Muslims who are most vulnerable to extremist views?
- The different views of Muhammed and Jesus
- Ways to reach out and reputable resources for info; would like to learn more about
- Mainstream Islam rather than extremism
- Would like to learn as much as possible!
- More similarities; beliefs behind rituals/traditions
- Not just how they are same but different
- More about what is in their teachings

- What do Muslims think of Christian beliefs and how do they think we could be better people?
- Articles of Islam
- Compare Christian and Muslim prayer
- Traditions of Muslim faith
- Life in the US as a Muslim among Christians today
- 5 daily prayers; group prayer vs. individual
- Praying
- Presentation answered most all of my concerns
- I would attend another class
- There is a lot of "control" in Islam; why the number of prayers? Dress -- what if women didn't do as (illegible) say?
- Cultural interpretation that divides God's people
- Christ died for us?!
- How can open minded Christians and Muslims promote peace within each tradition -- enlightened or reformation
- How do Muslims think of Christians?
- Their gospel and teachings
- Quran
- Culture, food, dances, daily life
- Following up on what was taught today and solidifying the knowledge
- How Christianity and Islam are more similar
- How to figure out the answer to poor, illiterate people being taken advantage of in the name of Islam?
- How do we breach the stereotypes
- Cultural differences
- Common ground
- Still unconvinced about female equality
- Would like to see another class with small group sessions after
- Some specific strategies on how to improve Muslim-Christian relations
- Ways to come together/build relationships and how to find common ground/establish similarities and celebrate differences
- Role of women in Islam
- More discussion on finding common ground
- Genital mutilation and the reasons for it
- The seeming inconsistency between God's will and free will/accountability
- Sufism; intersections of belief; women's rights within Islam and concept of equality

- How we can educate others more
- The Quran is more tied into Judeo-Christian than I thought
- How much different it is from what we hear on TV
- Maybe more day to day practices; how not to offend
- Why more cannot be done to condemn the "loose cannons" interpreting the Quran
- How Christians can take responsibility for initiating bridge building faithfully
- The cultural background of Muslims in those nations that seem more violent -- is the violence due to faith or culture?
- Culture, holidays, cultural events, etc.
- Details of the religion; traditions; daily life
- Muslim perceptions of Christianity
- This was fantastic and I would like to see it repeated.
- Would love to bring my family members that missed this. Would like to see Islam 102.
- Sharia law -- origins, specific info that would help us better understand what leads to the conflict, hatred, and injustices round the world
- How they live their daily lives
- Sharia law. Attitudes toward/restrictions on women
- The large similarity between Christian and Muslim. I knew there were some but not so many
- The whole picture of Muslims; their family life
- The nature of the relationship of the individual to God
- Trip to Mecca. We need to have more opportunities to meet other Muslims. How about a potluck?
- Repeat Islam 101
- What we have in common and what separates us
- How children are raised in religion
- Problem (for me) is NOT Christian-Muslim but difference between answer church (as Muslim was presented) and journey church (FCC)
- History and polity of Islam. Does each mosque have a leader? How did that person prepare to lead? Can women lead in Islamic congregations? Is there a connection between American Muslims and Iranian and Syrian Muslims? Denominational connection?
- How to reconcile the confusing messages espoused by Muslim extremists
- Prayer practice
- A lot more -- fascinating

- Why? Not just about Christian-Muslim but all religions
- Daily life of women and girls

What were you most surprised to learn about Islam today and why? (127 responses)

- Belief in many prophets; Jesus and the Virgin birth. I had thought that everything was about Mohammed
- Belief in Jesus as prophet
- Role of women and that the faith held women equal since the 600s
- Muslim women have had rights for so many years
- They accept Jesus
- Similarity to our religion
- They are so like us
- Commitment to charity
- Constantly mindful of God; belief in angels and holy books; use Arabic for closest meaning
- Belief in angels and that they record all things that people do; relationships between husbands and wives
- All prophets are honored; similar beliefs in Jesus' birth and death -- I would like to know more
- Women feel that they are treated like queens and often prefer this to the freedoms that we experience
- Belief in angels
- Islam incorporates many of the Hebrew and Christian learnings and Holy Books
- Jesus and Mary
- The role of Jesus. We are so much more alike than I knew
- Similarities between Islam and Christianity
- Islam is a peaceful religion
- Attitudes towards Jesus and Mary, angels; Islam viewed as continuation of Judaism and Christianity (layers)
- Women still haven't become full citizens
- Rights of women -- how they are NOT subjugated
- Everything because I knew nothing before. Five Pillars
- Importance of prayer and the content of prayer
- Book-keeping God; levels of heaven/hell
- Many different views, common misperceptions

- Praying 5x day
- Women have more rights than I thought. Our perception is that women are considered lesser humans -- walking behind, covered up, etc. Possibly these are cultural not religious differences
- Believe and follow Jesus
- Lack of judgment of non-Muslims
- That the Quran must be read in Arabic
- Belief in Judeo-Christian prophets; surprised to learn how inflexible to change through time
- The amount of daily prayer
- What the beliefs actually are because I wasn't sure before
- Speaker's personal agreement with Muslim dogma, Sharia law, etc.
- Similarity in our beliefs
- Similarities between Christian and Muslim practices -- didn't know that they were so intertwined
- The belief in one God and Jesus; treatment of women
- Beliefs concerning Jesus
- Women are treated well; purpose of their dress; fact that women choose their dress
- True Islam is peaceful
- That their beliefs are similar to Christian beliefs
- Women had financial inheritance rights so long ago -- we assume they are not equal to men. Money earned by women does not need to be shared with husband.
- Did not know that there were exceptions to the Muslim life. I thought that if you couldn't do them, you couldn't be a Muslim
- The contextual addition to warring. [sic] Phrases that are taken out of context
- The role of women
- Quran is the same all over the world
- Belief in Jesus and share so many Christian values
- How many of the traditions are cultural instead of religious.
- That "Allah" literally means God -- they are one and the same
- How similar Christianity and Islam are
- No surprise, I had very little understanding to begin with
- How similar it is to the Christian faith
- How similar Christians and Muslims are
- Different beliefs regarding heaven/hell; that fact that all people regardless of religion have an equal chance of going to heaven

- The myths of Islam. I liked them because I knew nothing about them before.
- The overlap of history involving prophets
- The different levels of heaven and hell; how highly women are valued; how the biggest differences in Islam are cultural
- I think I knew most of that
- Responsibility for actions
- Five Pillars
- Women's role; war and jihad
- Connection of Islam to our religion and Islam's belief in Jesus as a prophet
- Believe in the same people as us
- I learned more specifics
- Christian and Islam similarity
- That they acknowledge prophets of Judaism and Christianity; that they must EARN their way to heaven
- Not much
- Five pillars and the level of physical and mental strength
- Religion of peace? Passive attitude
- Pursuit of knowledge highly prized by both sexes
- That Dr. Oz is Muslim
- Five Pillars because they have to spend their whole life in faith, prayer, fasting, charity, and Mecca
- How they viewed Jesus
- Anyone can be Muslim, no matter what race you are
- I knew Christianity and Islam had similarities, but I didn't realize how many
- Muslims do not believe that Jesus is the son of God
- Haj
- Triad between Judaism, Islam, and Christianity
- How many prophets are in the Quran; that "jihad" does not mean holy war
- How concise and concrete the religion
- Shared beliefs
- Love the reason to pray 5x daily -- want to do that too; to be more mindful, present, aware of God
- Recognition of all the prophets
- The broad equality of men and women in Islam. From much of what we see and hear on the news, women do not appear to be treated equally

- Importance of Jesus and Mary in the Quran
- Place of Jesus in Islam
- Message of peace and the history of Islam.
- I liked learning all the parts of Islam. Thank you so much
- The equality of men and women; how little I remember from my Comparative Religion course in college 50+ years ago
- Free will; that Buddha might be considered a prophet; angel beliefs; beliefs about hell; Jesus viewed as the messiah
- They believe in Jesus as messiah and the Virgin Birth
- The Five Pillars
- Understanding concept of multiple prophets and Islam accepting all
- The ideas are very fundamental
- That Columbus is a refugee destination. This is fantastic and helps create the diversity of the city
- How much the Jewish and Christian prophets are mentioned in the Quran
- The role of Jesus, Mary, etc.
- That there is no "central office" like the Vatican
- I have some difficulty with any religion having a list of what their followers MUST believe
- Sunni and Shia delineations
- The books of faith (when Muslim you are Christian and Jewish too) and the dress of women -- used as a means not to judge one another on basis of looks but rather an understanding of the person
- How peaceful they are
- Islam is required to study and worship all of the Holy books
- Similar beliefs
- The similarities between Islam and Christianity in regard to the belief in Jesus as a prophet and miracle of God
- I was spelling Muslim wrong -- Moslem oops! What is culture versus religion based [on]? I had a lot of misconceptions and was amazed by Christian-Muslim similarities
- The way Jesus and Mary are regarded
- The connection between the acceptance of Judeo-Christian beliefs and the acceptance of other beliefs in general
- Reinforced that Islam is a peaceful religion. They do not teach to harm others. Belief in Jesus
- Shared basis with Judaism and Christianity
- The similarities and myths; it gives me a better understanding

- The percent of income after bills are paid that is to be given to charity
- The peacefulness
- The connection with Judaism and Christianity
- Islam doctrine concerning the rights of women given the predominant suppression of women in Muslim countries
- I always wondered why you could not find a Quran in English; about angels; eternal life depends on actions, not grace
- Number of Muslims in the world today
- Importance and equality of women in history of Islam
- That it is so answer oriented
- Muslims believe that David and First Testament prophets and Jesus are all worth reading about
- That the Gospels are part of the Holy books of Islam; the belief in angels and their importance
- View of angels and their importance; that they believe Jesus was a miracle and will return; pursuit of knowledge
- That Islam guaranteed the rights of women to own property and vote in 610 AD
- I did not know about the belief in angels and the extent of it
- Similarity to Christianity
- That they believe in the other prophets, not just Mohammed.

Appendix E

TOOLS FOR BRIDGE BUILDING ACTIVITY

For Participants: Cultural Etiquette

Thank you for agreeing to join in building bridges with our neighbors at the Noor Islamic Cultural Center. There are a few etiquette guidelines you will want to know.

First, relax! The Noor is accustomed to having people of other faiths as visitors. While we will all do our best to be respectful guests, you do not need to be overly concerned about “doing something wrong.” That being said, there are some guidelines to follow.

Touch: Generally speaking, Muslim men and women do not touch each other outside of their families. This means there is no handshaking with the opposite sex. This can be difficult for friendly, polite people (all of you). When I am in a mosque or interfaith event, I hold a notebook, purse or water bottle in my right hand to stop me from reaching out without thinking. Some American Muslim men will shake hands and when they extend their hand first, you should extend yours.

Prayer: The Noor folks will have prayer time at 2 pm on Saturday. Our hosts have invited us to observe or participate in prayer in any way you choose. (You will want to come a few minutes early to get settled.) The prayer room for men is on the first floor; you can't miss it. The women's space is on the second floor. (The word mosque refers to the prayer space; a “cultural center” is a building with a mosque, meeting spaces, classrooms, etc. It would be the difference between the words *church* and *sanctuary* for us.) You can watch from the hallway or you can enter the prayer space and participate. You will take off your shoes to enter the prayer space. Female guests are not prohibited in the men's space, but you should stay toward the back. If you want to get on your knees and join in, I think women will be most comfortable in the women's space upstairs. I have participated in prayer at the Noor; it happened to be the day I learned a good friend's mother was dying. It was a profound experience to touch my forehead to the floor as I prayed for both of them.

Dress: Muslims of both sexes dress modestly—definitely no shorts for men or women in the mosque. Women should wear a neckline that fully covers any suggestion of cleavage (the Qur'an calls this the “pocket.”) It would be best to cover your arms as well, with a $\frac{3}{4}$ or full-length sleeve. If you wear a skirt it should be well below the knees.

The most important thing you will bring to this experience is your willingness and your open heart.

Room Arrangement and Materials List

In the room where the event will be held you will need:

1. Chairs in a circle to begin
2. An area for refreshments
3. A “drop zone” indicated by tape on the floor or a plastic bin
4. A table for each small group to use as a construction area
5. A clear area of at least 20 feet for groups to fly their balloons

Materials you will need:

1. 4-6 helium filled balloons attached with ribbon to a weight
2. Post-it notes
3. Pens
4. Paper clips
5. Extra small binder clips
6. Tape
7. Scissors
8. String

After the balloon flying activity, instruct participants to remain in their small groups and rearrange the chairs to accomodate small group discussion.

Instructions for Small Group Guides

Today you are the guide of a small group of about six people. Your role is to steer participants in the right direction and answer questions such as, “What should we be doing now?” You will also lead conversation in your group. There are questions below for you to seed the discussion, but the ideal circumstance is that participants ask the questions and surface the issues that they most want to talk about. The guide’s involvement should be minimal; ideally the conversation has energy and unfolds organically. Your job is to be sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and keep track of the time.

The flow of the day has three main sections:

1. Hot air balloon activity
2. Brief small group discussion of values
3. Small group debrief of activity and guided conversation

Following is your role in each section:

1. Hot air balloon activity: During orientation, you will be taught a method for “cargo release” that you will demonstrate for your group. Other than the cargo release, please let the group figure out the mechanics on their own. The working and problem solving together is the purpose. The group may do its official flight whenever it is ready
2. Values discussion: After the flights, your group should return to their seats and someone will bring you a handful of small pieces of paper, each with a value written on it. Your group should look at each value and consider whether it is a distinctly Muslim or Christian value. This is a brief conversation after which the program leader will call everyone back into the large group.
3. Small group conversation: You will guide your group through a debrief of the hot air balloon activity and then an interfaith dialogue. When this conversation begins, write down the time here: _____ . This will help you manage your time. You should spend about one-third of your time on the first set of questions about the balloon activity and two-thirds of your time on the interfaith dialogue section.

Questions to ask to debrief the hot air balloon activity

- What did you learn from this?
- How will you describe this experience to people who weren’t here?
- What was it like working together? Any surprises?

Questions for interfaith dialogue

- Many of us have a person who really influenced our faith development...who sort of "taught" us our faith. It may be a family member or someone else. Who is that person for you?
- Has there been a time in your life when your faith really kept you going, a difficult time that you can't imagine not surviving without a faith in God?
- What do you most want to know about the other faith? This is a time to get really honest. What are you passionate about in your faith?
- What do you wish people knew about your faith tradition? (So: what do Muslims wish Christians could know about them and vice versa?)

Backup dialogue questions if you have extra time

- What motivated you to come today?
- Do you practice your religion in the same way your parents did? If not, what are the differences?
- What, if any, questions do you have about God?
- What does your faith say about loving the neighbor and welcoming the stranger? How does that relate to interfaith relationships?

The event will close with the program leader thanking participants and asking them to complete the evaluation forms. You will have the evaluation forms to distribute to your group.

Balloon Construction Specifications

1. Each person in the group should choose one value (religious or secular) that he or she believes is very important in life. Write this value on a small Post-it note.
2. Build a cargo basket using the sheets of paper and other materials. It must hold the value statements your team has created.
3. Construct a drop mechanism that will drop the values when your blimp flies into the Drop Zone of the bridge. It must be designed so that the Cargo Drop Master can activate a lever (made from a paper clip) while the balloon hovers over the bridge foundation. The binder clips and clothespins can be used in the basket if desired.
4. Construct a safety line for the Safety Officer to use. Devise a way to tie the safety line to the balloons so that when the weight is removed none of the balloons can escape.
5. If you finish your hot air balloon before it is time for all teams to fly to the drop zone you may do test flights. These test flights may take place anywhere in the room. Practicing is encouraged.
6. The flight plan calls for your Blimp to fly from your table (Airport) to the drop zone, hover over the bridge foundation and drop your values to form the foundation that is sturdy and has integrity.

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